AFTER THE BATTLE

THE GREAT ESCAPE
THE DEATH OF ADMIRAL RAMSAY

HIGH WYCOMBE AIR HQs

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CONTENTS

THE GREAT ESCAPE 1

WAR FILM
The Wooden Horse/ The Great Escape 15

VETERANS RETURN
The Great Escape Plus 50 21

UNITED KINGDOM
The High Wycombe Air HQ 28
'Southdown' 28
Strike Command 33
Wycombe Abbey 36
'Pinetree' 37
The Exodus 39
Exodus Plus 41
High Wycombe Air Station 42

50 YEARS AGO
The Death of Admiral Ramsay 44

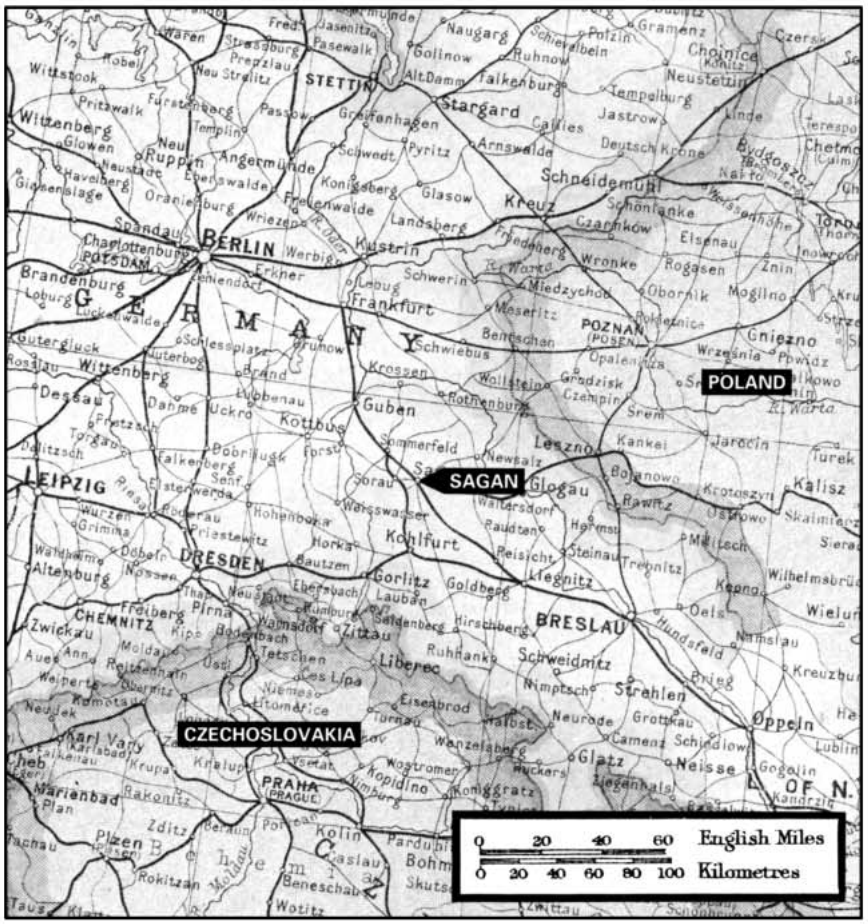
Front Cover: Fifty years ago, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, met his death in an air crash at Toussus-le-Noble, France.

Centre Pages: Fifty years after the Great Escape, former prisoners pay their respects at the graves of the 50 escapers who lost their lives, and are now buried at Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery in Poland. (Jan Bartelski)

Back Cover: Fifty years after the death of Admiral Ramsay and his staff and crew, we returned to the graves at St Germain-en-Laye just outside Paris. (Karel Margry)

Photographic Credits: AP – Associated Press; ECPA – ECP Armées, Paris; IWM – Imperial War Museum, London; PRO – Public Record Office.

Sagan — Stalag Luft 3. 'The camp was set in a clearing of the pine forest; a few single-storey wooden barracks raised on piles above the ground, huddled together inside the wire; the wire itself, the main feature of the camp, strong and heavily interlaced, a twelve-foot double fence of bristling spikes. There were arc lamps hanging above the wire and at intervals along each fence stood "goon boxes", small sentry boxes on stilts higher than the wire. These goon boxes were armed with machine guns and carried searchlights which swept the camp continually during the hours of darkness. There were two guards in each box, connected by telephone to the main guardroom at the prison gates. "Posten" carrying tommy-guns patrolled the wire between the sentry boxes.' Eric Williams, *The Wooden Horse*. (IWM)



Stalag Luft 3 was just one of five prisoner-of-war camps established around Sagan, 100 miles south-east of Berlin. Each Army Corps Area (Wehrkreis) of the German Reich supported the camps under its jurisdiction, broadly split into 'Oflags' (short for Offizierslager) for officers and 'Stalags' (Stammlager) for other ranks. However, officers were included in some Stalags like Stalag Luft 3 as RAF aircraft were only crewed by officers and NCOs.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

By Jan Heitmann

The history of Air Force captivity in Germany began on September 3, 1939, the day war was declared in Europe, when an RAF officer was shot down on a reconnaissance mission over the North Sea. His opponent, who flew a German seaplane, landed alongside the floating wreck and took the pilot prisoner. During the remainder of the year, a few more aircrews were shot down and captured and, by the end of 1939, a total of 13 were housed in a castle near the city of Kassel.

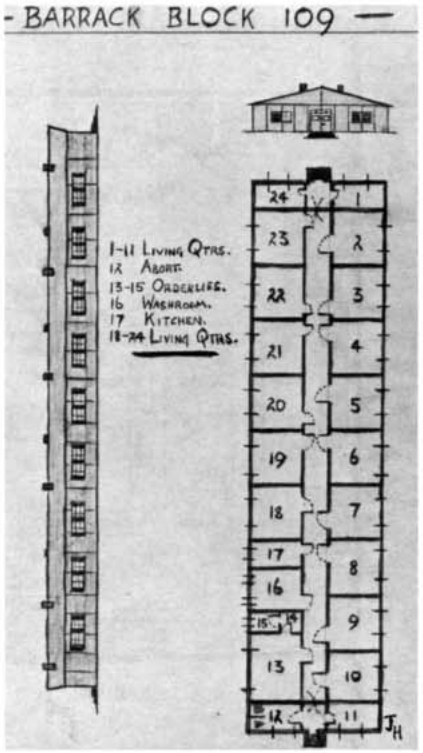
After the war, a myth grew up that, in these early days of the war, relations between the Germans and their air force prisoners had been one of great chivalry and that prison life in Luftwaffe PoW camps had been very comfortable. However, in practice, the life of an air force prisoner differed only little from that of the members of the other Services. The prisoners were housed in permanent brick buildings and were locked in cells, and prevented from any sort of communal life. It was not until the spring of 1940, that the permanent buildings were abandoned and the first wooden huts were built in small barbed wire enclosures.

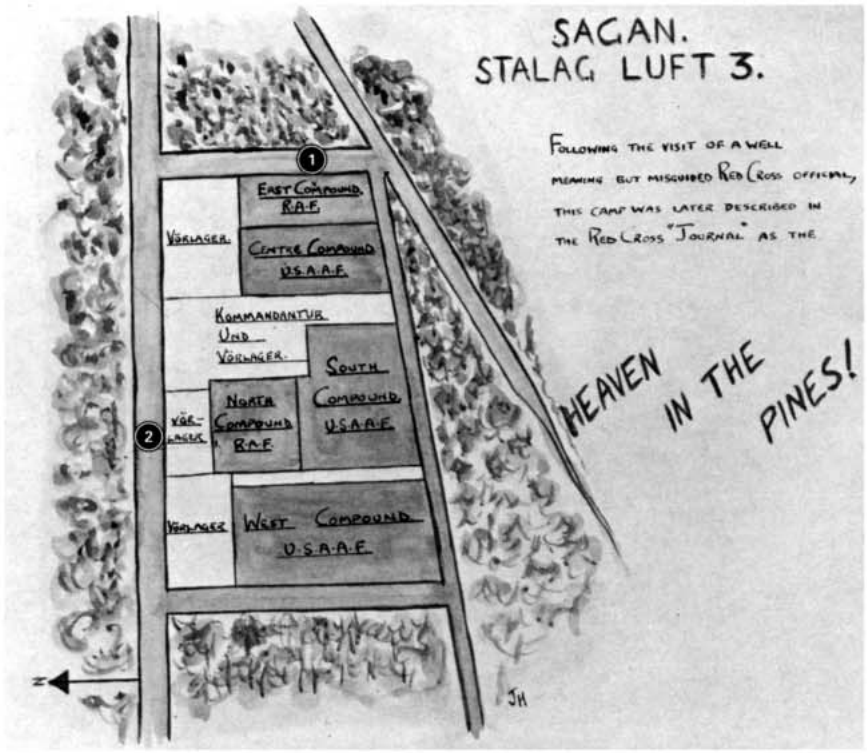
In April 1942, the Luftwaffe's most famous camp, Stalag Luft 3, was opened at Sagan in Lower Silesia, about 100 miles south-east of Berlin. Silesia is a historic region which is generally considered the basin of the upper and middle Oder river. Upper Silesia, the southern highland region bordering on the Sudetan mountains, was long second only to the Ruhr area as a major central-European military and political prize, largely because of its immense natural resources and industrial development. Frederick the Great battled the Habsburgs for control of Silesia from 1740 to 1763 and, at the end of the Seven Years' War, Prussia became ruler of the whole region. It remained in Prussian hands until 1919, when, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, Upper Silesia, except for the extreme southern part, which became part of Czechoslovakia, was given to Poland. The opposition of Silesia's German population to live under foreign rule was so strong that a plebiscite under the League of Nations was held in 1921. The pro-German result prompted the Weimar Republic to demand the return of Upper Silesia. Poland, however, refused to surrender to the German demand. In the end, the League of Nations ruled on the matter and divided the area between the two claimants; the heavily industrialised southern section being awarded to Poland.

In 1942, it was intended to house all air force prisoners at Sagan and, by the end of that year, all but a few had been concentrated there. Sagan was the seat of a Duke of Courland, in the days when Courland was part of Russia, and the site of a battle where the Russians defeated Frederick the Great. During Napoleon's reign, Sagan came into the hands of a French family and a Duc de Sagan was still the owner of the château, which was built in French 18th century style, when war broke out in 1939. The Germans respected this title to ownership but requisitioned the property later in the war.

Around the château had grown up a small and rather uninteresting town, important only as a railway junction which provided railway connections to most parts of Germany and Eastern Europe. The surrounding country is flat, the horizon only broken by small woods. South of Sagan is a dense forest which runs unbroken for between 20 and 30 miles toward the Czechoslovakian border and spreads about the same distance east and west.

In June 1944, the Swiss Minister in Berlin was handed a Note in response to an enquiry he had made as the representative of the Protecting Power. This communication stated that 37 prisoners of British nationality, and 13 of other nationalities, who had escaped from Stalag Luft 3 had been shot while attempting to escape, and that urns containing their ashes had been returned to Sagan for burial. Those urns were interred within this memorial erected by the prisoners themselves in a secluded forest clearing outside the perimeter of the camp.




SAGAN.
STALAG LUFT 3.
Following the visit of a well meaning but misguided Red Cross official, this camp was later described in the Red Cross "Journal" as the
HEAVEN IN THE PINES!
East Compound R.A.F.
Vorlager
Centre Compound U.S.A.A.F.
Kommandantur und Vorlager.
South Compound U.S.A.A.F.
North Compound R.A.F.
West Compound U.S.A.A.F.
JH

Stalag Luft 3 comprised several separate compounds, these sketches being made by John Hamilton who was quartered in Hut 109 in the North Compound. At first, each room was shared by six officers, but later this was increased to eight or ten. The East Compound (note that north is to the left) was the original Officers' Camp and was the scene of 'The Wooden Horse' escape [1] by Eric Williams (who also wrote the book of the same name), Oliver Philpot and Michael Codner in October 1943, and the North Compound that of 'The Great Escape' [2] in March 1944. (IWM)

Stalag Luft 3 was situated on the northern edge of this forest. A great clearing had been made in the trees and wooden huts had been built. Pre-fabricated and erected in sections, the huts were divided into rooms if meant for officers and divided in half if intended for NCOs. Each barrack hut measured about 160 feet by 40 feet, and contained a small kitchen in which tinned food could be heated and water boiled, and a primitive urinal, but there was neither running water nor drainage. The equipment never reached the standards the Germans themselves laid down and sanitation and drainage were poor. The floors, double-skinned as were the walls, were of wood laid on low piles about one foot clear of the ground. In the early months, a wooden skirting around the outside of the barracks closed this gap but was later removed because it enabled the prisoners to get under the floors without being seen.

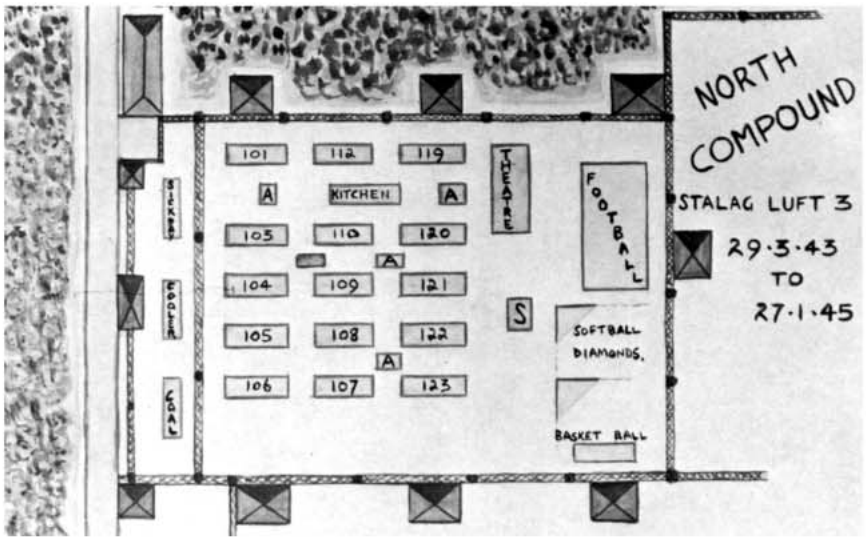
Into these barracks came air force prisoners from camps all over Germany. By the middle of the summer of 1942, there were more than 500 officers and 1,000 NCOs in what were known as the East and Centre Compounds. From its original two compounds, later housing 2,500 officers and NCOs, Stalag Luft 3 grew to six compounds, eventually housing some 10,000 officers and about 300 orderlies. The NCOs were evacuated in the summer of 1943 and thereafter had their separate history. When the numbers being shot down exceeded German expectations, other camps had soon to be built or re-opened. Stalag Luft 3, however, remained the chief camp for British and American air force officers until the evacuation in January 1945.

The defences of Stalag Luft 3 were quite usual and the German guards' sense of chivalry was governed mainly by circumstances. Many attempts to escape from the camp had taken place before the famous mass tunnel escape in March 1944. Proposals for tunnels came from almost every hut and, during the summer of 1942, at least 30 to 40 tunnels were begun from the various huts in the East Compound. However, all except one were unsuccessful, mainly due to the distance from the barracks to the wire, which was never less than 60 yards, and to the fact that all the entrances to the tunnels were underneath the barracks and only little effort was made to find new ways of disguising them. It was also nearly impossible to hide the great quantity of bright yellow sand which was excavated.

In the forest at Sagan, the sand under the topsoil went down to a depth of 78 feet before it reached water, but at a depth of between four and six feet there was an admixture of clay which was firm enough to allow tunnels to be driven through it without support. However, as ground microphones were already in operation, the prisoners had to dig below the layer of clay at a depth of 12 to 15 feet, and to shore up the tunnels with wood.

As one tunnel after another was discovered, the escape experts were forced to think again and to concentrate on ways and means of completing at least one or two tunnels and, in particular, on devising new and more entrances. One of the leading and most experienced experts in escape was the South African-born Squadron Leader Roger Bushell who had been exiled to Stalag Luft 3 after four previous escapes. Thick-set and of medium height, he was known as a flamboyant character. Bushell had been at Brazenose College, Oxford, in the early 'thirties, then became a barrister and joined No. 601 Squadron. As a pilot, he showed all

John Hamilton (standing, in the white shirt) with the occupants of rooms 6 and 7 of Hut 109 — a picture taken sometime in 1944. (IWM)



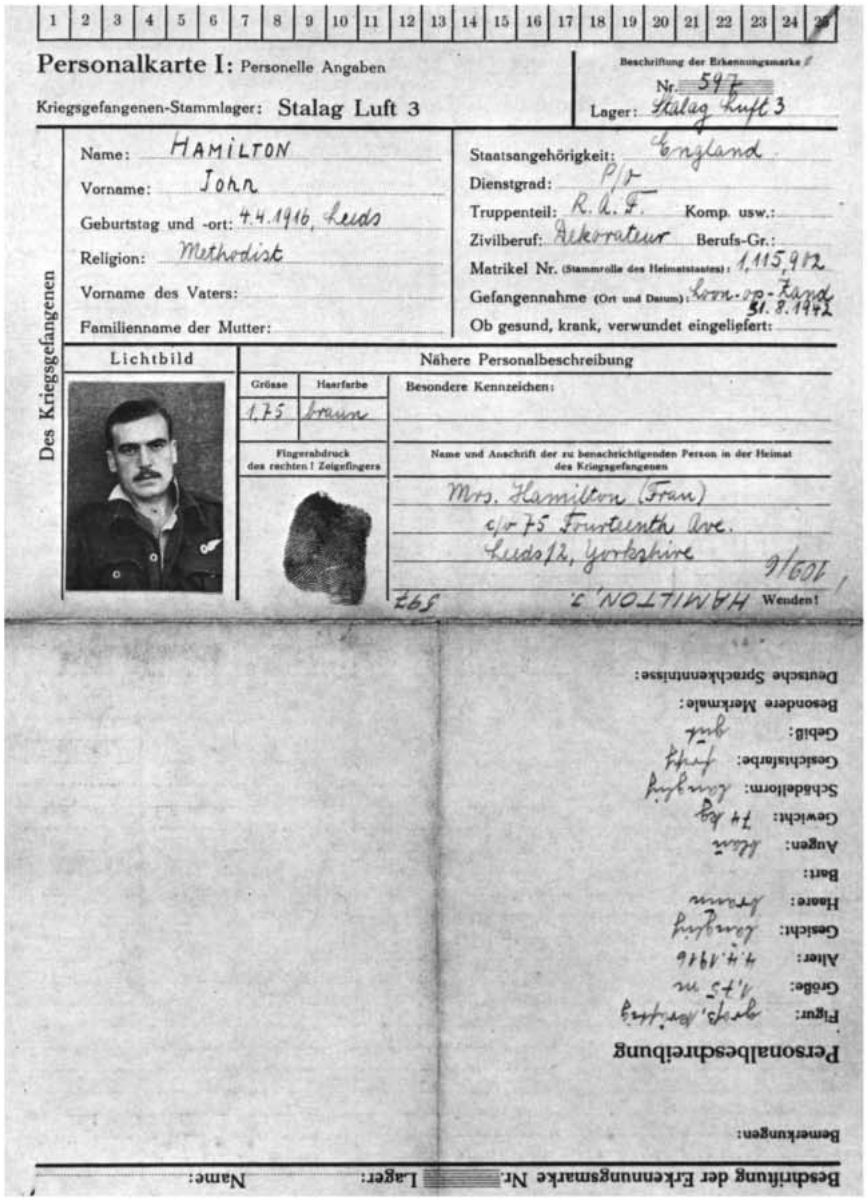
Left: **Roger Bushell, famed member of No. 601 Squadron and seen here in happier days with an Avro 504, was 'Big X' — the British escape officer for the North Compound.** *Above:* **Another illustration by John Hamilton who has added the dates of his own incarceration. (Charles E. Brown/IWM)**

the characteristics that he possessed in ordinary life and he proved to be a first-class leader of men. Early in 1940, he was given command of the RAF's top-scoring Spitfire squadron, No. 92, and was shot down shortly afterwards over the beaches of Dunkirk.

Bushell brought many special qualifications to his life as a PoW. Besides his ability of flying and skiing, he had acquired an intimate knowledge of sections of the German–Swiss border and had also made himself a first-class German speaker. From the moment he was captured, he did all he could to turn his qualities to account. He added to them an enormous knowledge of everything connected with escape and a remarkable power of organisation. In the early days of the escape organisation, he held the post of Intelligence Officer. Later, in Stalag Luft 3, he became Chief Executive in the East Compound, and later the officer in command of all the tunnelling operations in the North Compound, under Wing Commander, later Group Captain, H. M. A. Day as Chief Executive. There he had been planning a mass break-out for more than a year. Eventually, Roger Bushell was one of the first to leave the famous tunnel in March 1944, and one of those who subsequently lost their lives in the attempt.

Being in charge of the Escape Committee in Stalag Luft 3, code-named 'X', by the spring of 1943, Bushell, known as 'Big X', organised the simultaneous digging of three long tunnels, always referred to as 'Tom', 'Dick' and 'Harry' so that the word 'tunnel' would never be heard by any of the German guards. Tunnels were considered the best way of bringing about a mass escape and, taught by experience, the Committee had resolved to subordinate all other considerations to security. Too often, the tunnels had been betrayed by the guards discovering the sand which had been taken out of them.

Under Bushell's leadership, four important decisions were taken. The first was that tunnels were to be carried out as camp operations under direct control of the committee. Secondly, it was decided to start three tunnels in different parts of the camp simultaneously. Experience had shown that it was about thirty to one against any tunnel succeeding, but if three tunnels of elaborate construction and larger dimensions were dug at the same time, there was at least the chance that the Germans would not discover all of them. Thirdly, the direction of the tunnels had been fixed. The shortest distance lay to the west and it was decided to build two



Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager: Stalag Luft 3

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke: Nr. 547 Lager: Stalag Luft 3

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Name: HAMILTON
Vorname: John
Geburtstag und -ort: 4.4.1916, Leeds
Religion: Methodist
Vorname des Vaters:
Familienname der Mutter:

Staatsangehörigkeit: England
Dienstgrad: P/O
Truppenteil: R.A.F. Komp. usw.:
Zivilberuf: Dekorateur Berufs-Gr.:
Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): 1,115,912
Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): Sidi-bu-Zaid 31.8.1942
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:

Lichtbild

Nähere Personalbeschreibung

Grösse: 1,75 Haarfarbe: braun
Besondere Kennzeichen:
Fingerabdruck des rechten! Zeigefingers
Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen:
Mrs. Hamilton (Frau)
c/o 75 Fourteenth Ave.
Leeds 12, Yorkshire

HAMILTON J. Wenden!

Personalbeschreibung
Figur:
Grösse: 1,75 m
Alter: 4.4.1916
Gesicht:
Haare:
Bart:
Augen:
Gewicht:
Schädelform:
Gesichtsfarbe:
Gebiß:
Besondere Merkmale:
Deutsche Sprachkenntnisse:

Bemerkungen:

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke Nr. Lager: Name:

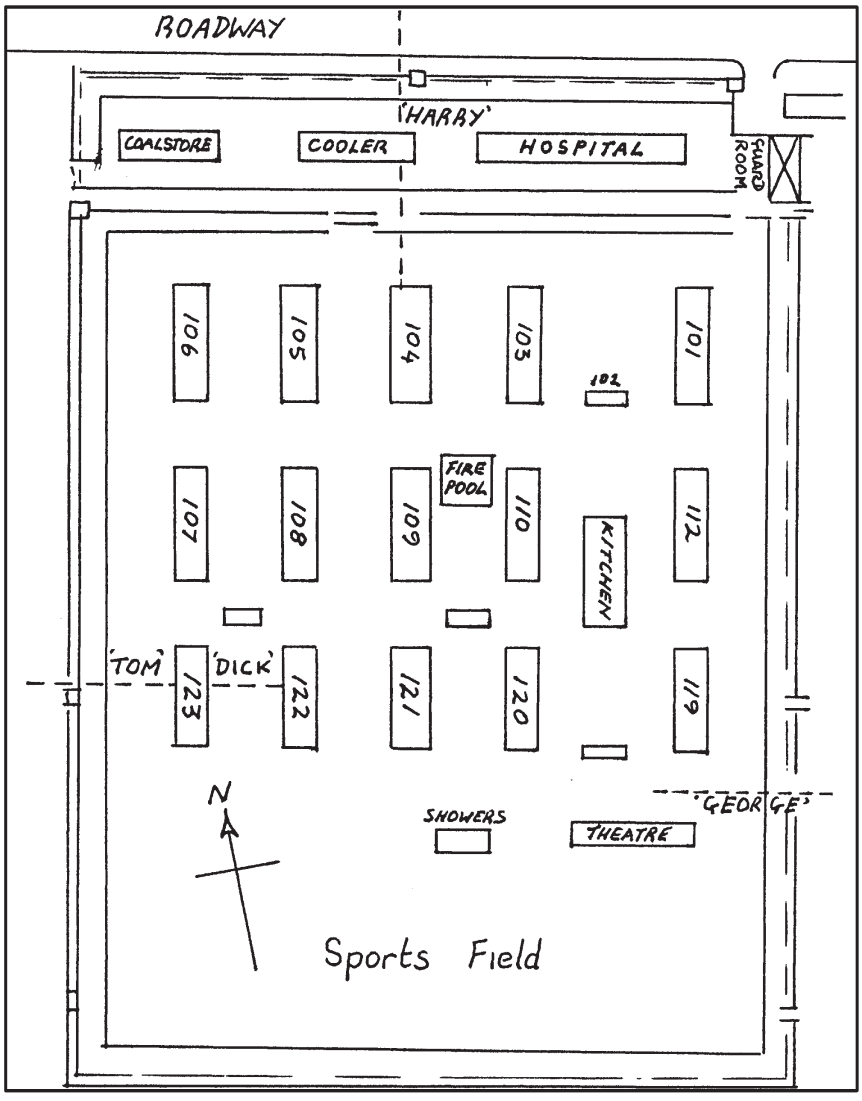
After he was liberated, John Hamilton was fortunate to obtain the original record wallet that the camp authorities had kept on him. (IWM)

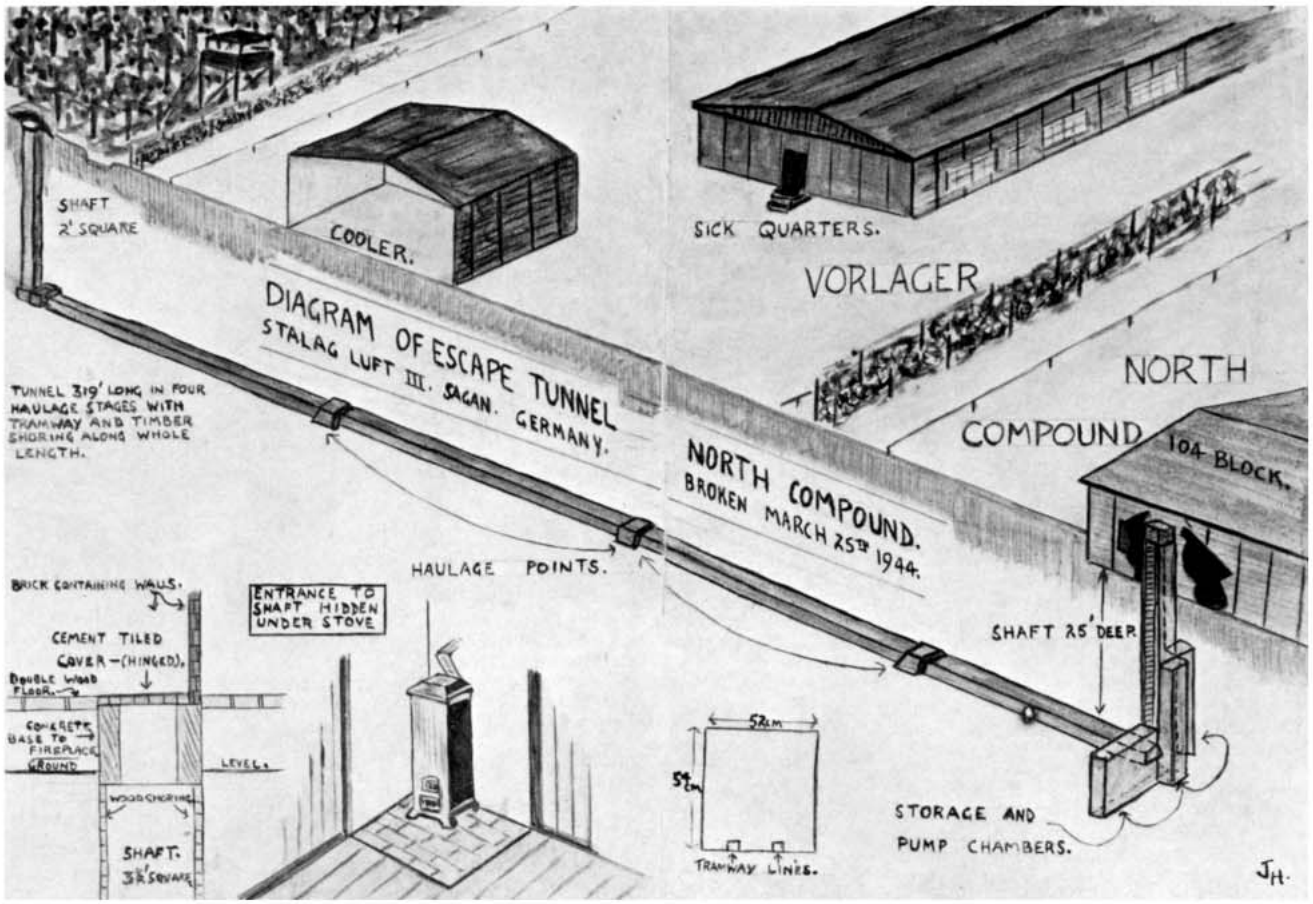
Eric Williams: 'The surface of the compound was a mixture of sand, powdered leaf-mould and dirt, which in the summer formed a thick layer of soft dust sometimes blown by the wind into a blinding cloud which hung like a pall across the camp. In the winter this dust was churned by the prisoners' feet into a grey sea of clinging mud. Under this top layer the subsoil was clean, hard yellow sand. Yellow when damp, but drying to a startling whiteness in the sun. The Germans knew that every tunnel carried its embarrassment of excavated sand and viewed each disturbance of this grey upper layer with suspicion. Every excavation made for a drain, rubbish pit or garden was carefully watched by the ferrets, or security guards. It was only by elaborate camouflage that the tell-tale yellow sand could be hidden in these places. The skin of grey dust formed one of the most effective defences of the camp.' *Right:* **The Kommandant of Stalag Luft 3 was Oberst Friedrich von Lindeiner-Wildau, a veteran of the First World War and an officer of the old school. (IWM)**

tunnels in that direction, one from a hut on the outside and the other from a hut more towards the centre of the camp. The third tunnel was to be built in a northerly direction from a barrack hut on the northern edge of the compound. Lastly, it was decided that if at any time during the course of operations the suspicion of the guards was aroused, work should be stopped immediately. Wally Floody, a Canadian fighter pilot, who had gained mining experience as an engineer, was put in charge of the digging operations, hence his nickname 'Tunnel King'.

On April 11, 1943, work began. The construction of the trap doors which disguised the entrances was one of the most dangerous phases of the tunnelling operation and was carried out by a group of Polish officers serving in the RAF, who were expert engineers. In the barracks, the floors of the wash-rooms and lavatories were concrete and the few feet around the iron stoves in the rooms were tiled and laid on brick foundations which went straight into the ground. This meant that when a guard went underneath a hut to search for a tunnel he could neither see nor penetrate into the section which these foundation walls enclosed.

Although hundreds of escape tunnels were planned and dozens started at Sagan, four major tunnels were dug from the North Compound which was surrounded by two barbed wire fences, each about nine feet high and some five feet apart, the space in between filled with coils of wire up to a height of about six feet. 'Tom' ran from Hut 123 towards the forest to the west but, despite all precautions, the tunnel, some 280 feet long and already up to the trees, was discovered accidentally by a German guard just before its completion. The tunnel dug from Hut 122 was named 'Dick' and, like 'Tom', it ran in a westerly direction. However, when the Germans started to cut trees to build the new West Compound, the tunnel was abandoned and used for the dispersal of the sand excavated from the other tunnels.





'Harry', the third tunnel, through which some 80 prisoners attempted to escape, started from Hut 104 and ran in a northerly direction. After the Great Escape, the tunnel was filled with sewage and its entrance and shaft were sealed with concrete. Another sketch by John Hamilton. (IWM)

'Tom' was dug from Hut 123, and the site chosen for the trap was in the concrete floor of a small passage next to the kitchen. Its construction meant cutting out a square of concrete and replacing it with another square of concrete which could be lifted easily. The square which covered the opening was fitted as tightly as possible, the cracks being concealed by cement covered with ordinary floor dust while the original concrete slab from the floor was broken up and powdered. Because it was a straight cut in a cement floor, this was the most precarious of the three traps.

The tunnel dug from Hut 122 was named 'Dick' and, like 'Tom', it ran in a westerly direction. Its trap, which was amongst the most ingenious ever constructed, was also cut through a concrete floor with the entrance in a sump under a wooden grating in the washroom. The sump was normally three-parts full of dirty water, thus providing almost perfect disguise. The trap was made by removing the side which had no pipes, replacing it by a concrete slab which could slide up and down. When fitted, the bottom and the sides were made watertight by using clay mixed with a small quantity of cement. When the sump was filled with water again, detection of the trap was virtually impossible.

'Harry', the third tunnel, which eventually was to become the prisoner's last hope, started from Hut 104 and ran in a northerly direction. In one room, the prisoners removed the stove and made an extension to its chimney so that it could be used even when not standing on its correct spot. All the tiles were lifted separately, cleaned and refitted in a wooden tray, which was hinged along one side so that when the stove was removed the whole section could be lifted cleanly in one piece.

With the traps for all three tunnels completed, the first and highly dangerous phase of the operation was finished. The second phase was the construction of the vertical shafts and the chambers at their base. Actually three chambers were required in each tunnel, one to house the air-pump, a second for storing sand until it could be dispersed, and a third for use as a workshop. The shafts were dropped down for 30 feet and were wood lined and shored, as were the tunnels. The wood for the shoring came from two sources. First, the prisoners stripped every bed and then they removed the lower half of the double-skinned floors in the barracks. Over 3,000 bedboards and floorboards vanished, undetected by the German guards, and were fashioned into box-frames for shuttering.

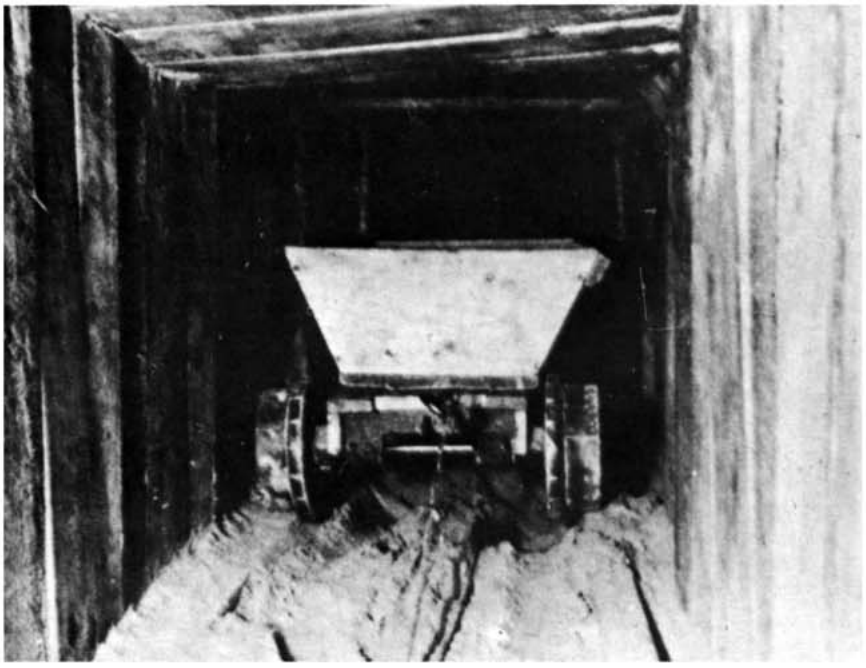
The final tunnel, code-named 'George', started off from a trap-door beneath the auditorium of the camp theatre (the building on the right standing parallel to the sports field). In January 1945, it was decided by the Escape Committee that the war had reached a stage which made escaping hardly worth while, and 'George', whose exit was beneath and beyond the wire, was sealed off. Eric Williams explained that 'fifteen feet inside the main fence was a single strand of barbed wire [which can be seen bottom right]. This was the trip-wire and anyone stepping over it was shot at by the guards. A narrow pathway trodden by the feet of the prisoners ran round the camp just inside the trip-wire. This was their exercise ground, known as the circuit. It had become a convention to walk round the circuit only in an anti-clockwise direction.' (IWM)

As at Colditz (see *After the Battle* No. 63), the camp authorities recorded the evidence after escape attempts although the photographs taken at Sagan are of poorer quality. Ventilation was provided by linking together dried milk tins. (IWM)

The tunnels were ventilated by air pumps, designed by a Norwegian pilot, and illuminated by electricity, the equipment being stolen and the current tapped from the camp supply. From old Red Cross dried milk tins air pipelines were made, which had secret intakes, and were taken along with a transferable nozzle, foot by foot, as the tunnels progressed, buried under the railway tracks on the tunnel floors. An underground trolley-railway running on rails made out of beading and battens, which were removed from the walls of the huts, served the whole length of the tunnels, using two interchange sections. These trolleys, which could carry 200lbs of sand, were designed not only to carry spoil but to transport workers as well. The diggers had to change trucks twice to go the full length of the tunnels and the trolleys with their flanged metal-tyred wheels, were hauled backwards and forwards by a rope made of plaited string. One man, lying full length, hacked away at the sand, while another digger, lying just behind, passed it back on the railway. Nearly every day, owing to the loose sand, there were dangerous falls which held up work badly. The men digging used to work naked or in long underpants because clothes would have restricted them and characteristic dirt stains would have alerted the Germans.

Getting rid of the bright yellow sand was one of the biggest problems. The sand from previous tunnels had usually been put underneath the barracks, but however carefully the sand was mixed with soil or covered over with the dry earth underneath the huts, it was invariably detected. Therefore, in this case it was decided that the ground underneath the huts was to be left undisturbed. Under these circumstances, the dispersal of so much sand was no simple matter. Prisoners carrying sand had to disguise their movements sufficiently well, and as far as possible sand was moved only during the mid-day meal period and in the evening, when there were only few Germans in the compound.

Lighting was by electricity tapped off the camp supply, but emergency illumination had to be on hand in case the power was cut — which is exactly what happened on the night of the big escape. (IWM)



Bed and floor boards were used to shore up the tunnels, the loose sand being transported in trucks. These were deadened by spreading blankets over the rails so that they would run silently. A rough calculation indicates that 'Harry' would have required the removal of around 100 cubic yards of spoil which then had to be disposed of within the compound. This job alone entailed the employment of over 250 prisoners. (IWM)

Sheer bad luck had revealed the existence of 'Tom' — a bitter blow to the Escape Committee as it had been driven nearly 100 yards from Hut 123 to the tree line and was almost ready for use. To the Germans it was a major coup — no wonder one of the guards nicknamed 'Rubberneck' looks pleased. (IWM)

At first, sand was carried in bags slung across the back of the carrier's neck and hanging on his chest underneath the battle-dress blouse, but this method proved unsatisfactory. Later, another method was adopted. Towels, which were issued to every prisoner, were made into narrow sacks. These sacks were hung on an adjustable sling. Each sack was slit up the side and fitted with three metal eyes and button-holes. The slit was closed by securing the eyes in the holes by a long pin which was attached to the top of the sack by a string. Simply by pulling on the string it was possible to open it. The slings were worn across the back of the neck so that the sacks hung inside the trouser legs above the knee. Using this method, the sand carriers, known as 'penguins', were constantly walking in full view of the guards and none was suspected.

The number of prisoners employed in the disposal of sand varied from 200 to 250. A separate team composed of up to 50 Americans supervised the camouflage of the sand after it had been deposited on the selected areas. There were many places which were suitable for the dumping of sand. In addition to the natural dumps such as sand heaps thrown up by drains or other legitimate excavations, there were patches of sand and gravel which had been exposed where tree stumps had been pulled up, several cleared areas where PoWs played deck-tennis or some other games, and gardens. New sand had either to be mixed thoroughly with what was already there or it had to be buried and covered completely with the top soil. At every dump there was a supervisor to ensure that no 'penguin' did his work superficially.

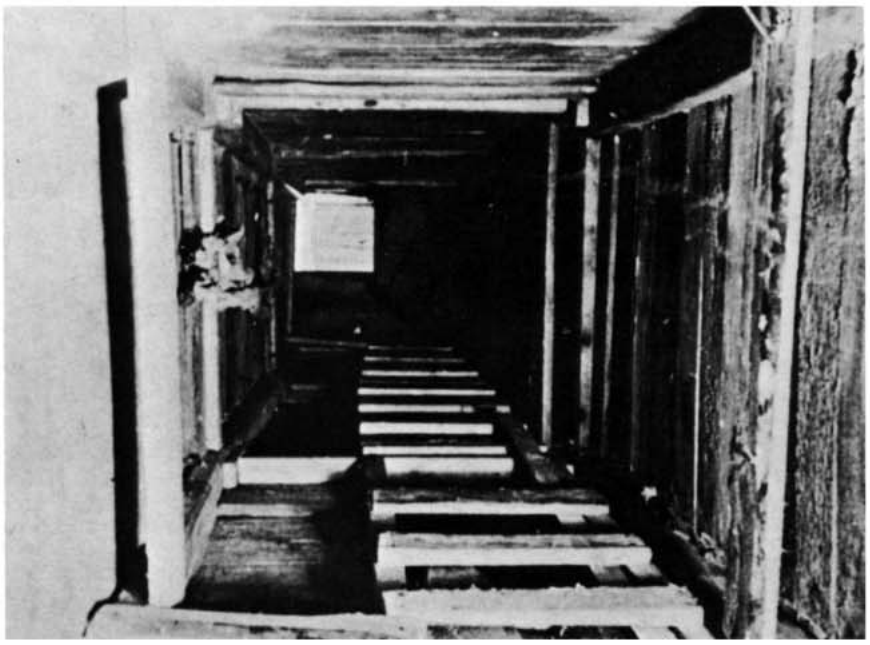
While the three tunnels were being dug slowly during the summer months, rumours had spread that another new compound was to be constructed to the west just where 'Tom' and 'Dick' were intended to break surface. When the Germans started to cut away the trees in the area in question, it became necessary to modify the tunnelling campaign. As the trap door of 'Tom' was the most vulnerable of all, 'X' decided, to complete 'Tom' at once. 'Harry' was closed for the moment and 'Dick', which was already 70 feet long, was abandoned and used for the dispersal of the sand excavated from 'Tom' because there was no chance of finishing 'Dick' before the new West Compound would be completed.

Meanwhile, up above, hundreds of PoW sentries, called 'stooges' and 'duty pilots', were safeguarding the escape activities. All the German guards were tailed around the clock so that they could not move an inch without their actions being flashed to the prisoners' various control points. However, despite all precautions, 'Tom' was discovered accidentally. With the tunnel 280 feet long, the diggers were beyond the original fringe of trees and needed to go only another 10 feet before cutting a vertical shaft to the surface. At that point, the Germans made some very thorough searches of Hut 123 but failed to find the trap until some civilian workmen, who were laying a drain-pipe, left their tools lying about. By pure chance, one of the guards picked up a pickaxe, then threw it away, but the point landed right on the edge of the trap door. 'Tom' was discovered. For the purpose of destroying the tunnel, a sapper was sent from one of the nearby Wehrmacht units, and he blew up the tunnel with dynamite, wrecking in the process parts of Hut 123, a watchtower, and one of the camp's water mains which served not only the prisoners but the German compound as well.

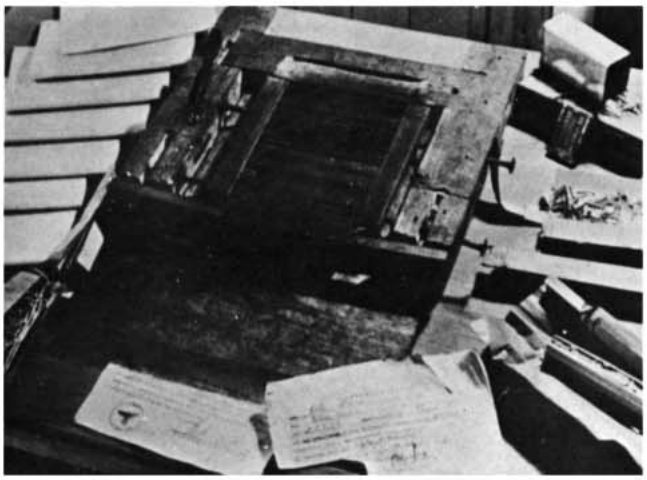
Two days after the discovery of 'Tom', work was resumed on 'Harry'. However, it quickly became obvious that the Germans, who spent much time in the compound and carried out regular careful searches, remained suspicious. This made tunnelling very dangerous and therefore, after a period of only four days, 'Big X' decided to cease all tunnelling operations for an indefinite period until German suspicions had been finally lulled. The winter passed comparatively uneventful, and it was not until January 1944 that excavation work restarted.

While the digging on 'Harry' progressed, lots of preparations for the mass escape had to be made. In total, 600 PoWs had a hand in the tunnelling and the many escape services. An Australian flight lieutenant ran a factory which made 200 compasses out of melted gramophone records and magnetised sewing needles. Another officer ran the forgery department which produced 400 forged passes, identity papers, and personal letters and industrial orders on embossed business notepaper. Even 'printed' and 'typed' characters in all these forged papers were painted by hand, including 'typewriting mistakes'. A former racing driver cut the rubber stamps for these passes out of linoleum and from the heels of boots, and embossed the handmade writing with the back of a toothbrush. All these items were carefully stored for the day of escape in a complex of safe-deposits. Genuine photographs for the passes were taken in a clandestine studio by a flight lieutenant, who was also the chief weather forecaster, with a camera blackmailed from a compromised German guard.

A Lithuanian pilot, Flight Lieutenant Romas Marcinkus, was the principal pumper of information from the Germans. He was intelligence expert for the Baltic and the Netherlands, intelligence and language adviser to the forgery department and a fund of knowledge on the economics, military dispositions and transport within Germany. Using German newspapers, which the censor allowed him, with a travel guide and a railway timetable, he compiled a dossier of the week-to-week changes in everyday German life, locations of industry, and the railway timings which were essential for a successful escape.



Official German picture taken looking back up the entry shaft to the trapdoor. (IWM)



Printing equipment and forged papers. Hundreds of sets of false documents had to be produced for the Great Escape. (IWM)

A map department produced over 1,000 detailed and extremely accurate four-colour maps. Others worked in the tailoring workshop which produced 50 full civilian suits from blankets for those going by train and other 'upper class' escapees, and dyed and re-worked uniforms into something sufficiently different. The department's best effort was the manufacture of a German Army uniform to be worn by a Pole who spoke fluent German. A considerable stock of genuine German money was slowly accumulated, so that tickets and food could be purchased. There was also a food factory which supplied each escapee with ten day's rations of a concentrated fudge made of sugar, cocoa, condensed milk, raisins, oats, margarine and chocolate.

Work both in the tunnel and on the surface went smoothly and the February moon period came and went without incident. On March 14, 1944, the last shift of diggers returned to the surface and the officer in charge of the trap sealed it to await the day for the tunnel to be used. Ideally, the night of escape needed to be moonless, with a strong wind to cover up the noise, not too cold, and without too much snow on the ground. The mass escape was planned for March 24 which would be moonless, and it was also a Friday. The next night was also moonless, but the trains would be running on weekend timetables which would severely handicap the escapees. The weather was bad but Roger Bushell decided that the occasion had to be seized, because the committee did not believe that security could hold out for another month.

The date eventually decided on for the breakout had to be final. Whereas an operation even as vast as 'Overlord' could be postponed because of adverse conditions, this was not possible with the escape. The date stamps on 400 forged passes were one of the most critical factors, simply because they were not roughly stamped on in a second, as with genuine passes, but needed far more care when they were applied. A whole year's production would have been ruined by bearing the wrong stamp.

Even with a tunnel ready and waiting, escape was not quite so simple as might be imagined. Careful organisation was therefore necessary. The decisions Bushell had to make a fortnight ahead concerned the priority of those who were to go out; the equipment they were to take; how their arrival at the hut should be regulated; and how they should be passed through the tunnel and out at the other end with the least possible delay and with the least possible risk of any guards seeing them when they emerged. The escapees had to be fitted out with the correct clothes for the rôles they were playing; they had to be given time to learn their route, and they had to be word-perfect in their cover stories to cope with being challenged en route.

All 600 PoWs who had taken some part in the tunnelling and the escape preparations were considered eligible for a place in the escape. As some people had worked longer and harder than others, 'X' decided on certain priorities and the first places in the order of exit were specially selected. Then, about 200 officers were chosen by secret ballot, all in a precise order of exit.

On the chosen day, darkness fell at about 9 p.m. with dawn on the Saturday at about 5.30 a.m., so that there would be eight and a half hours during which the escape could be made. The collection of more than 200 extra people in a single hut needed careful planning and the prisoners concerned assembled undisturbed in Hut 104 right before zero hour.

At about 10 p.m., two experienced tunnellers broke through the last few inches. However, when the surface was reached, it was found that calculations were slightly adrift, and, instead of being just inside the wood, they were a few feet short. The exit shaft came up into open ground just a few yards from a German sentry box and searchlight. Bushell grimly decided to carry on, but the pace of the escape was slowed. The result was a serious delay in getting each man away from the exit and into cover. After that, the tension was electric, as the men, quivering with excitement, dressed in heavy clothes, clambered on the trolleys one at a time and went off towards the exit.

Left: **'Big X', right, pictured with Battle of Britain ace Bob Tuck. One of Roger Bushell's instructions for stooges** *(right)*, **detailed to keep a look-out when work was under way below ground, was also found by the Germans. (IWM)**

Left: **The stove in room 23 of Hut 104 which stood on the trapdoor covering the entrance to 'Harry'.** *Right:* **As photographed by the Germans after the escape attempt was foiled just before 5 a.m. on the morning of Saturday, March 25, 1944. (IWM)**

There were inevitable complications which hampered the operation. Several people became stuck in the tunnel because of their bulging baggage. This sort of thing caused several falls of sand which blocked the tunnel, nearly buried the men and had to be cleared under nerve-racking conditions. Thus, the rate of departure for the first one or two hours was only one man every 12 minutes. Then at about midnight came a most unwelcome interruption. The sirens sounded and the hut shook with the distant impact of bombs. Berlin was a little less than 100 miles away, and Sagan was often affected by diversionary flights coming down from the north, less so by the normal bomber stream converging on the capital. But on this particular day unforecast high winds scattered the bombers from their narrow stream and swept them east of Berlin. On any other occasion, a British raid on the Reich's nerve centre would have been greeted with cheers, but in this night it meant that all the lights in the camp went off, plunging the tunnel into darkness. Grease lamps, held ready for an emergency, were installed, but before the shafts and the tunnel could be sufficiently illuminated, another 35 minutes had been lost.

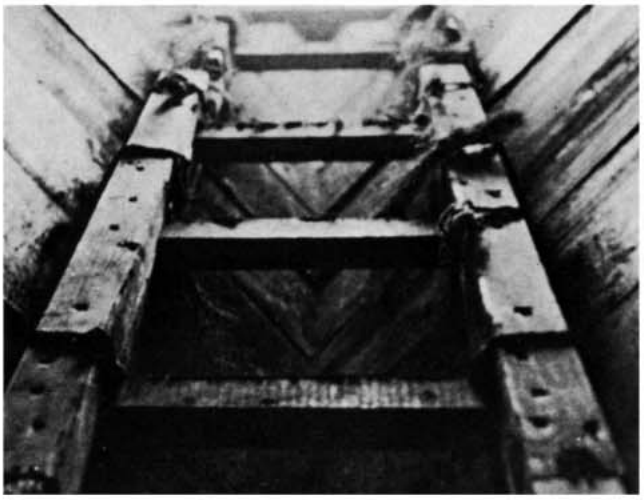
Shortly afterwards, further delays were caused by two shoring frames being knocked out of place, resulting in a serious cave-in. Owing to all these problems, the rate of departure, far from having increased, dropped to one man every 14 minutes and the control officer gave the order that no more men were to be taken into the tunnel. But even with this modification, it had already become clear that at least half of those who had drawn places would not be able to go and many were ordered back to bed.

At 4 a.m., the last change of guard took place among the sentries patrolling the wire, and 50 minutes later it was starting to get light. The officers in charge therefore announced that number 87 on the list would be the last man to go through the tunnel, to be followed by a closing-up party who would try to reseal the exit shaft in order to give the escapees a chance by delaying its discovery for as long as possible. There was also the faint hope that the tunnel might not be discovered and that it could be used again.

At 4.55 a.m. exactly, just as this very last man was disappearing down the entrance shaft, a German patrolling sentry walked along the edge of the wood. He was some distance away from the PoW controlling the tunnel exit but, for some reason, he was walking wide of his beat instead of close to the wire. If he kept on his chosen line he was bound to walk right on to the tunnel mouth. The controller himself and the man who had just came out lay prone and motionless. The sentry came on. He then stepped a foot from the tunnel mouth, almost fell in the hole, did not see it, practically trod on one of the escapees lying motionless in the snow, missing him by an even narrower margin, but spotted another prisoner about 30 yards away. In the brief moment when the German lifted his rifle and brought it into the ready, the leader of the last group emerged from behind the trees, waving his arms and shouting in German 'Don't shoot'. Then came the sound for which all had been waiting subconsciously throughout the night — a rifle shot. The shot missed. After a few seconds, the sentry recovered his senses, pulled out his torch, shone it down the hole and saw the man who was waiting his turn, the 80th man on the list. For two or three seconds there was dead silence. Then the guard blew his whistle and the game was up.

Within half an hour there was murderous chaos in the camp. The Germans were plainly in a state of great agitation. It was a tricky situation because the guards had their hands on the triggers while a full muster of the camp was called and a photographic check of every prisoner was completed to ascertain who had escaped. The total was 76, excluding the prisoners in the shaft and the three in the snow round the exit, who were immediately put in solitary confinement. One by one, most of the others were rounded up, frostbitten and completely exhausted. Of the 76 prisoners who escaped, three reached England, four were recaptured and sent to Sachsenhausen, two to Colditz, one was imprisoned in Berlin and another in the PoW camp at Barth on the Baltic coast, 15 were returned to Sagan and the remainder were shot. As a result of the escape, the camp Kommandant, Oberst Friedrich Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau, and some of his officers were relieved and were put under immediate arrest.

Perhaps this Luftwaffe NCO was the last man through the tunnel, which had enabled 76 prisoners to escape the wire, before it was sealed. But this was no ordinary escape and the retribution was to be widespread. (IWM)

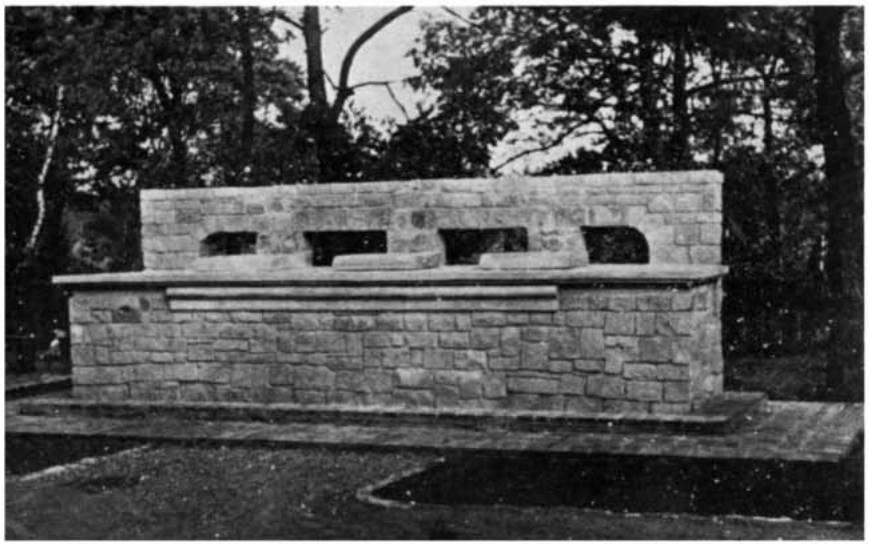


Three men were caught outside the exit and seven more in the tunnel, their footprints frozen in time in this 'scene of crime' photograph. Although they were given solitary confinement in the 'cooler', they were the fortunate ones.

Naturally, only very little was known in the camp of the progress of those who had escaped until some of them returned at the end of the first week in April and managed to smuggle notes out of their cells giving the names of others who had been seen in various other prisons. Once the initial agitated reaction of the camp authorities had died down, life for the prisoners settled back into something near the normal although there was an uneasy foreboding in everyone's mind that perhaps some particular reprisals might be on the way. One morning, the Senior British Officer, Group Captain Martin Massey, was summoned to the office of the new Kommandant, Oberst Braune. Also sent for was the interpreter, Squadron Leader 'Wank' Murray. At this meeting, a tight-lipped Braune informed Massey that he was ordered by the German High Command to state that of those officers who had succeeded in getting away, 41 had been shot while resisting arrest or in their endeavours to re-escape after having been arrested. Breathless with shock, Murray had some difficulty in conveying this statement in English. Immediately, Group Captain Massey guessed that something extremely serious had occurred, and he asked for repetition. Then he asked how many had been wounded. The stone-faced German officer, who appeared to be ill at ease, quoted the statement again, saying that he could add nothing further. Massey persisted in his question and Oberst Braune replied that he thought that none had been wounded. With that, the conversation was concluded.

It seemed obvious to Massey that the Kommandant was under orders not to tell the whole story but gradually it was pieced together in face of Massey's persistent demands, and from information obtained from the Germans on an unofficial basis. It was learned that Heinrich Himmler had personally decreed that 50 of those recaptured should be killed outright as a deterrent to future escape attempts. For the prisoners there was no doubt that the Luftwaffe, nominal guardians of Stalag Luft 3, were bitterly ashamed of what had taken place. The Luftwaffe High Command had apparently made strong protests, pointing out that not only was this contrary to the Geneva Convention but that they, as the captors, fully recognised the duty of attempting escape laid upon every Allied officer, and stressing that their own officers in Allied hands were under the same orders.

A few days later, a list of those who had been shot was given to the Senior British Officer and pinned up on the North Compound notice board. It gave 47 names to which three were added later. The list of the victims included the names of Roger Bushell and many other principal organisers of the escape. Shortly afterwards, some of the personal belongings of those who had been shot were returned and, towards the end of April, 50 cremation urns were brought into the camp, each of which bore the name of one of the victims. Now the camp authorities showed their sympathy and, in co-operation with the Senior British Officer, arrangements were made for the ashes of the murdered men to be buried. During the summer, permission was granted to build a stone memorial in the forest outside the camp in which the ashes, placed in three ornamental urns, could be kept and on which the names of the victims were engraved. A working party was allowed out under escort, and given materials to erect a memorial to their comrades. This was designed by a prisoner who had been an architect pre-war and was finished by the late summer of 1944. It was carefully tended by the prisoners while they remained at Sagan.



First to go was Oberst Lindeiner-Wildau, replaced by Oberst Braune *(left)*. To him fell the unpleasant duty of informing the Senior British Officer, Group Captain Martin Massey, that over 40 of those who had escaped had been shot 'resisting arrest'. By the end of April, the death toll had reached 50 and the cremated ashes had been delivered to Sagan. By now, the Luftwaffe camp administrators were as embarrassed over the massacre as the British were incensed, and facilities were given to the prisoners to construct a suitable burial tomb. A spot was chosen about mid-way between the town and the camp (see map page 22), and there a vaulted altar *(right)* was built in the forest. Three inscribed scrolls listed the dead, but these tablets were removed after the war on the orders of the Soviet occupation authorities.

While the monument was being erected, trials of the German staff of Stalag Luft 3 were taking place before courts martial in Breslau. Shortly after the escape, a team of Gestapo and SS men had arrived in the camp and carried out investigations which resulted in the court-martial of many of the German guards.

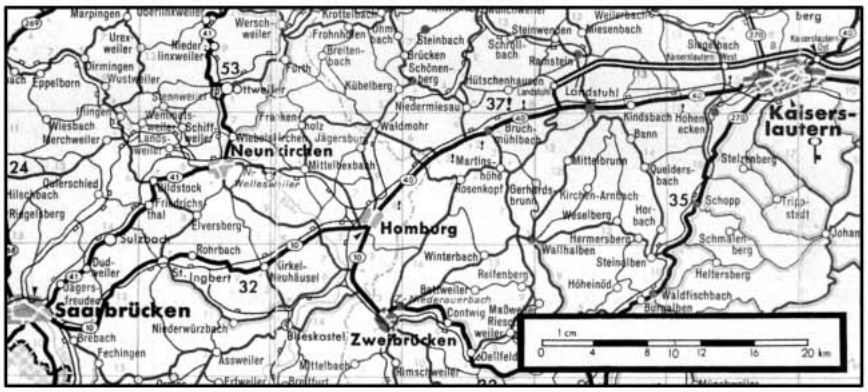
Two days after the escape, the 64-year-old camp Kommandant, a chivalrous veteran of the First World War, who had already formally requested that he should be court-martialled, was relieved of his post. Just before the escape, he had called the senior officers, chaplains and doctors to a conference and had given a sincere, though veiled, warning against mass escapes because the Gestapo had threatened to take matters into their own hands in the camps if such things occurred. Lindeiner was known as being pro-British, and he had in the past punished various members of the camp staff who had behaved incorrectly towards the prisoners. While he was under arrest, he suffered a heart attack and, much later, was tried by court-martial and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Before his appeal was heard, he had a nervous breakdown and his recovery delayed the promulgation of the sentence into the period of the collapse of Germany so that he did not serve the sentence. All the other accused were also given terms of imprisonment. However, all the sentences were cut short by the end of the war when the Kommandant and his staff were brought to England for interrogation.

Tunnelling activity did not cease after the mass breakout of March 24 and the subsequent slaughter. Work continued on a tunnel, the 101st to be dug at Sagan, starting off from a trapdoor beneath the auditorium of the camp theatre. However, the purpose of the new tunnel was different. The new 'Big X' thought it likely that the Sagan area might become a battlefield and, although the Germans had given assurances that PoWs would be moved away in time, it was felt that in the deteriorating conditions in Germany, such an assurance might not be carried out. Thus 'George', as this final tunnel was codenamed, was intended as a means by which the imprisoned officers could carry out their own evacuation if necessary. When, in January 1945, it was decided that the war had reached a stage which made escaping hardly worth while, 'George', whose exit was beneath and beyond the wire, was sealed off.

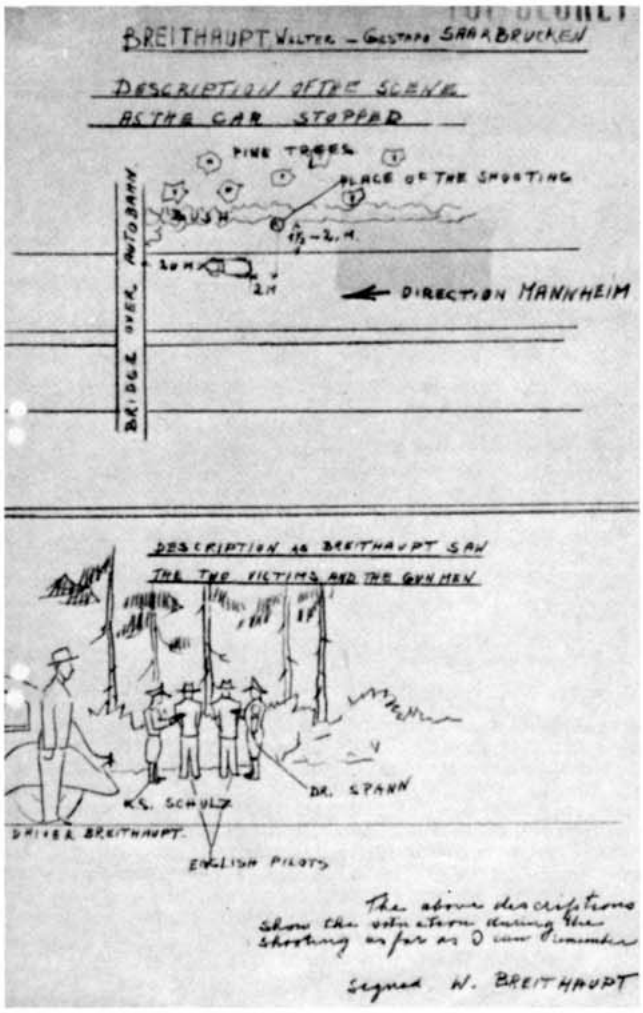
In the final phase of the war, Silesia became the scene of severe fighting. Many of the inhabitants fled westwards as the Soviet armies occupied the region. The week beginning January 21 saw a steady crescendo of events. On that day, a Russian tank unit crossed the River Oder to the north of Breslau only 50 miles from Sagan. The city had become a centre for refugees. Normally a town of 20,000 inhabitants, it was now said to be sheltering 100,000 people, and every day thousands more could be seen passing

When, as has been described, Monsieur Naville, the Swiss Minister in Berlin, was informed that 50 prisoners had been shot offering resistance to recapture, or while attempting to escape a second time, he frankly refused to believe what he had been told, all the more so when the Germans said that urns containing the ashes had been sent to Sagan for burial. M. Naville replied by stating that he was surprised that all the prisoners had been killed outright and that none had been wounded, and that the cremation was 'most unusual, the normal custom being to bury a prisoner in a coffin with military honours'. However, it was only after the war that the true circumstances came out. When interrogated, Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, the chief of the OKW, explained that 'one morning it was reported to me that the escape had taken place and that about 15 of the officers had been recaptured in the vicinity of the camp. I did not intend to report this case at the midday conference at Berchtesgaden as it was the third mass escape within a very brief period.' However, Keitel said that Himmler (then dead, having committed suicide on May 23, 1945 — see *After the Battle* Nos. 14 and 17) had forestalled him and announced the escape to Hitler who, in a fury, ordered that any recaptured prisoners were to be handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst. Himmler then issued instructions to the Gestapo to make sure that each man was shot while attempting to escape. Martin Massey prepared this Roll of Honour to remember them. (IWM)

The majority of the prisoners were shot during a car journey when a halt was made on the pretence of giving the men an opportunity to relieve themselves. Typical is the fate which befell Roger Bushell. Recaptured at Saarbrücken with Lieutenant Bernard Scheidhauer of the Free French Air Force, they were taken to the local police prison for interrogation. A few days later, they were put in a car by the Saarbrücken Gestapo chief Kriminalsekretär Emil Schulz personally. They left in the company of another Gestapo officer, Dr Spann, and a driver, Walter Breithaupt. The two officers were told that they were being taken to Mannheim. After some 25 miles, soon after they reached the autobahn, Schulz ordered the car to stop. The two Gestapo men stepped out of the car and, having lit cigarettes, went a little to one side. After they had finished their smoke, Breithaupt was called from the car and the prisoners told to get out and relieve themselves. Bushell and Scheidhauer went towards some bushes to the rear of the car, with the two Gestapo officers following, each with their pistol in their hand. As the prisoners were walking, they were told that they would be shot if they tried to escape. The officers were just unbuttoning their trousers, with the two Germans standing close behind them, when Schulz gave the signal. Both fired one shot at the same time into the neck of each man. Bushell, hit in the spine, turned on his back, rocking back and forth in agony with his knees drawn up. Schulz got down on the ground and calmly waited until the dying man's temple came round against his pistol before pulling the trigger again.



In 1944, the autobahn had only been built as far west as Landstuhl, and the testimony obtained by Squadron Leader Francis McKenna from the driver, Breithaupt, indicates that they stopped just before the first bridge.



We retraced the route and slowly brought our car to a stop as the bridge came into view. A layby conveniently allowed us space to pull off the carriageway . . . and stretch our legs . . . as Roger Bushell must have done. There, at the back of the field, the pine trees still stood as in Breithaupt's sketch. A moment's quiet reflection . . . that here the Great Escape ended . . . but in a way 'Big X' could never have foreseen.

When the Soviets pulled out of that part of Silesia, the inscribed tablets were replaced on the tomb. This originally contained the ashes of the dead in individual urns but some of these urns were broken following liberation, allegedly by soldiers looking for gold. On the instructions of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, in 1948 the ashes of 48 dead were removed and buried in Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery where their permanent commemoration could be assured. (Prior to this transfer, the ashes of two of the dead had been removed: a British airman was interred in Berlin War Cemetery while the other was a Norwegian national repatriated to his homeland.) Those in unbroken urns were buried in identified graves. Of the rest, the tops of only four urns were found together with a considerable quantity of unidentified ashes and these were buried in a separate plot marked with 18 headstones, of which two bear two names. In 1994, Sidney Dowse, one of the Great Escapers who survived (see page 21), contacted the CWGC with evidence indicating that the dates of death on the headstones of 18 of the victims were incorrect. (The correct dates are included in the table below.)

PRISONERS OF WAR EXECUTED AFTER THE MASS ESCAPE ON MARCH 24/25, 1944
(All buried in Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery unless otherwise stated)

Service Number	*PoW Number*	*Rank*	*Name*	*Date of Death*	*RAF Unit Unless Otherwise Stated*	*Nationality*	*Force*	*Grave Location Plot/Row/Grave*
J/5233	689	Flt.Lt.	Birkland, H.	31.3.44	72 Sqdn.	Canadian	RCAF	7 C 3
61053	760	Flt.Lt.	Brettell, E. G., DFC	29.3.44	133 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
43932	667	Flt.Lt.	Bull, L. G. DFC	29.3.44	109 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 C 1
90120	621	Sqdn.Ldr.	Bushell, R. J.	29.3.44	601 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
39024	24	Flt.Lt.	Casey, M. J.	31.3.44	57 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 D 3
400364	702	Sqdn.Ldr.	Catanach, J., DFC	29.3.44	455 Sqdn. (RAAF)	Australian	RAAF	Grave 9.A.
413380	676	Flt.Lt.	Christensen, A. G.	29.3.44	26 Sqdn.	New Zealand	RNZAF	Grave 9.A.
122441	727	F.O.	Cochran, D. H.	31.3.44	10 OTU	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
39305	2	Sqdn.Ldr.	Cross, I. K. P., DFC	31.3.44	103 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 C 2
378	634	Lt.	Espelid, H.	29.3.44	33 Sqdn.	Norwegian	RNAF	Grave 9.A.
42745	456	Flt.Lt.	Evans, B. H.	31.3.44	49 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 C 6
742	1264	Lt.	Fuglesang, N.		339 Sqdn.	Norwegian	RNAF	Returned to Norway
103275	118	Lt.	Gouws, J. S.	29.3.44	40 Sqdn. (SAAF)	South African	SAAF	Grave 9.A.
45148	673	Flt.Lt.	Grisman, W. J.	6.4.44	109 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 C 4
60340	5	Flt.Lt.	Gunn, A. D.	6.4.44	1 PRU	British	RAF	8 D 7
403281	6	W.O.	Hake, A. H.	31.3.44	72 Sqdn.	Australian	RAAF	7 D 4
50896	1423	Flt.Lt.	Hall, C. P.	30.3.44	1 TRU	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
42124	199	Flt.Lt.	Hayter, A. R. H.	6.4.44	148 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
44177	406	Flt.Lt.	Humphreys. E. S.	31.3.44	107 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 C 5
J/10177	42822	Flt.Lt.	Kidder, G. A.	29.3.44	156 Sqdn.	Canadian	RCAF	8 D 5
402364	1268	Flt.Lt.	Kierath, R. V.	29.3.44	450 Sqdn. (RAAF)	Australian	RAAF	8 D 3
P.0109	42801	Major	Kiewnarski, A.	30.3.44	305 (Polish) Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	Grave 9.A.
39103	652	Sqdn.Ldr.	Kirby-Green, T. G.	29.3.44	40 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 D 7
P.0243	678	Porucznik	Kolanowski, W.	31.3.44	301 (Polish) Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	7 C 5
P.0237	1392	Kapitan	Krol, S. Z.	12.4.44	74 Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	7 D 1
C/1631	710	Flt.Lt.	Langford, P. W.	31.3.44	16 OTU	Canadian	RCAF	7 C 7
46462	63	Flt.Lt.	Leigh, T. B.	31.3.44	76 Sqdn.	British	RAF	7 C 4
89375	522	Flt.Lt.	Long, J. L. R.	13.4.44	9 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 D 6
95691	655	2nd Lt.	McGarr, C. A. N.	6.4.44	2 Sqdn. (SAAF)	South African	SAAF	7 D 6
J.5312	1431	Flt.Lt.	McGill, G. E.	31.3.44	103 Sqdn.	Canadian	RCAF	8 C 7
89580	19	Flt.Lt.	Marcinkus, R.	29.3.44	1 Sqdn.	Lithuanian	RAF	Grave 9.A.
103586	715	Flt.Lt.	Milford, H. J.	6.4.44	226 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
P.0913	680	Porucznik	Mondschein, J. T.	29.3.44	304 (Polish) Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	8 D 2
P.0740	23	Porucznik	Pawluk, K.	31.3.44	305 (Polish) Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	7 D 5
87693	685	Flt.Lt.	Picard, H. A.	29.3.44	350 (Belgian) Sqdn.	Belgian	RAF	Grave 9.A.
402894	2433	F.O.	Pohe, P. P.	31.3.44	51 Sqdn.	New Zealand	RNZAF	Grave 9.A.
30649	832	Sous Lt.	Scheidhauer, B. W. M. H.	29.3.44	131 Sqdn.	French	FFAF	Grave 9.A.
213	1822	W.O.	Scantzikas, S.	30.3.44	336 Sqdn. (RHAF)	Greek	RHAF	8 D 4
47431	712	Lt.	Stevens, R. J.	29.3.44	12 Sqdn. (SAAF)	South African	SAAF	Grave 9.A.
130452	1279	F.O.	Stewart, R. C.	31.3.44	77 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 C 6
107520	836	Flt.Lt.	Stower, J. G.	31.3.44	142 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
123026	992	Flt.Lt.	Street, D. O.	6.4.44	207 Sqdn.	British	RAF	Berlin 1939-45 War Cemetery – 3 A 24
37658	388	Flt.Lt.	Swain, C. D.	31.3.44	105 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 C 1
P.0375	300	Porucznik	Tobolski, A. F.	2.4.44	301 (Polish) Sqdn.	Polish	Polish Air Force	Grave 9.A.
82532	415	Flt.Lt.	Valenta, A.	31.3.44	311 (Czech) Sqdn.	Czech	RAF	Grave 9.A.
73022	3776	Flt. Lt.	Walenn, G. W.	29.3.44	25 OTU	British	RAF	Grave 9.A.
J/6144	564	Flt.Lt.	Wernham, J. C.	30.3.44	405 Sqdn. (RCAF)	Canadian	RCAF	8 C 2
J/7234	930	Flt.Lt.	Wiley, G. W.	31.3.44	112 Sqdn.	Canadian	RCAF	7 D 2
40652	838	Sqdn.Ldr.	Williams, J. E. A., DFC	29.3.44	450 Sqdn. (RAAF)	Australian	RAF	8 D 1
106173	216	Flt.Lt.	Williams, J. F.	6.4.44	107 Sqdn.	British	RAF	8 C 3

Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Scotland, chief of the War Crimes Investigation Unit responsible for pre-trial interrogation and the production of evidence, is seen here in July 1947 in the Curio-Haus at Hamburg, where he testified in the case of 18 Germans accused of the massacre. (AP)

through by rail and road. On January 25, it became certain that the Red Army had crossed the Oder at more than one point. Two days later, the whole of Stalag Luft 3 was hastily evacuated at three hours' notice in the face of the advancing Red Army, then only a few miles away to the east. The six compounds moved out in geographical order. The march was in westerly direction and the most westerly compounds left first. On February 2, most of the prisoners had reached Spremberg, some 70 miles south-east of Berlin, and were entrained for Bremen. However, the train arrived instead at Tarmstedt, some 15 miles to the north-east, and the column marched to a nearby camp. On April 9, the prisoners were ordered to move again. With the spearhead of the advancing British forces not far away, freedom was in sight at last. This time, they marched north-eastwards, crossed the Elbe at Hamburg, and on May 2 they were finally relieved by tanks of the 11th Armoured Division at Trenthorst-Wulmenau, a large estate halfway between Hamburg and Lübeck.

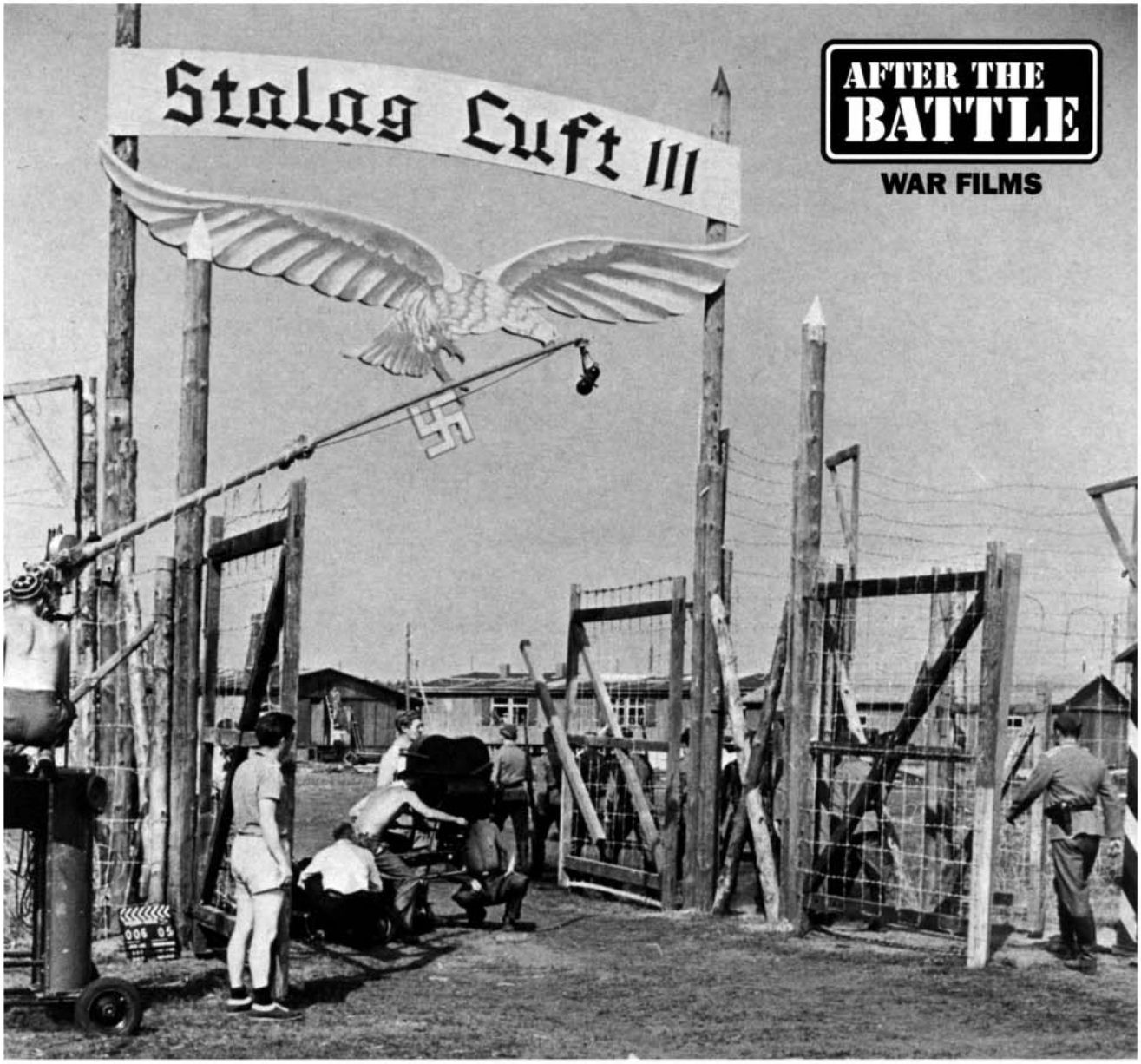
The war was over, but sealed in the minds of the former prisoners were the thoughts of 50 of their comrades being brutally shot. The officers had naturally only very limited knowledge of what had happened. On September 3, Squadron Leader Francis P. McKenna flew to Bückeburg, an airfield near Minden, 30 miles west of Hannover, to begin investigations. What had happened to the 50 escapees who had been murdered was pieced together, partly from evidence of those who were recaptured and survived, and also as a result of the indefatigable efforts of an investigation team which, from the moment the murders were known, was determined to try to bring to justice all those who had been directly involved in the killings. Under the personal direction of the Provost Marshal of the RAF, enquiries were begun in co-operation with the Judge Advocate General's War Crimes Section, Military Intelligence, United States Army War Crimes Liaison and the Czech and French War Crimes Commissions. The investigation team undertook a search through Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, France, Holland, and the Western Zones of Germany. Investigations took a full year and, after 60,000 Germans had been interrogated, the search was narrowed down to 319 people, 25 of whom were brought to Britain for further interrogation.

In 1947, 18 men were brought to trial at Hamburg, under the proceedings against war criminals instituted by the United Nations. After a trial lasting six weeks, 14 were sentenced to death by hanging, two to imprisonment for life and two to imprisonment for ten years. Two others committed suicide and the death of a third was established. A further two men were executed in Czechoslovakia after conviction for other war crimes and another was held in custody by the Czech government for war crimes against Czech nationals. Thus 24 of those involved in the murders had been accounted for. Those sentenced to death were hanged at Hameln prison on February 27, 1948. Meanwhile, enquiries continued in Germany. Another 28 individuals were known to have been directly concerned with the murders. Several were believed to be in the Russian Zone and it was also believed that the Poles had executed two more of the wanted men. However, the investigators did not close the file on Stalag Luft 3.

In a second trial, which took place in November 1948, one man was found not guilty. Another was found guilty and sentenced to death, but the verdict was quashed on review. At this time, the British Government passed through Parliament the suspension of the death sentence and so another death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Squadron Leader McKenna distributed thousands of photosets of 38 men still on his wanted list to the British, American and French occupation authorities and to the German civil police. Not all the men sought were guilty, but they might be able to provide useful information. Results were slowly forthcoming and many were traced, interviewed and released. During the late 'forties and the early 'fifties, more men were caught and put in prison, others were reported dead or committed suicide when arrested. Three men later were tried before German courts and were sentenced to imprisonment.

Of the 72 men indicted for killing and conspiracy to kill, contrary to the laws and usages of war, 21 were executed; 17 imprisoned; 11 committed suicide; 7 were untraced of whom 4 were presumed dead; 6 were killed in wartime; 5 were arrested, but for political reasons a charge was not proceeded with; one was arrested and not prosecuted but used as a material witness; 3 were acquitted, or the sentence quashed on review, and one remained free in Eastern Germany until his death. The resounding achievement of the Sagan executions investigation team, which had been responsible for some 100,000 interrogations and the physical arrest of many of the war criminals, was the moral victory.

The Curio-Haus on the Rothenbaumchaussee in Hamburg was built in 1911. Its libraries and auditoriums were used for educational purposes until 1933 when the building was taken over by the Nationalsozialisticher Lehrer-Bund (National Socialist Teacher Society). In 1945, the Curio-Haus was requisitioned by the British occupation authorities and it became the venue of more than 30 trials held by the War Crimes Court of the British occupation zone, including those against the guards of Neuengamme concentration camp; Generalfeldmarschal Erich von Manstein, convicted of being responsible for the deaths of partisans and Soviet PoWs; and Kapitänleutnant Heinz Eck, the commanding officer of *U-852*, who was sentenced to death for having ordered the killing of castaways. In 1947, 18 of those who were charged with the murder of the 50 PoWs from Sagan were indicted here and, after a trial lasting six weeks, 14 were sentenced to death by hanging, two to imprisonment for life, and two to imprisonment for ten years. Today, the building again houses a library and serves educational purposes, the actual courtroom, a former auditorium, now being used as a cafeteria for students of the nearby Hamburg University.



THE WOODEN HORSE/THE GREAT ESCAPE

By Trevor Popple

The Wooden Horse (1950) and *The Great Escape* (1963) are both significant war films primarily for two reasons. The former, with its modest production values, just happened to begin the series of prison camp pictures which seemed to stream steadily into British cinemas through the 'fifties, spilling into the mid-'sixties, whilst the latter, with its influx of American actors, wide-screen colour and lavish production values, came to be regarded by some as the apotheosis of the genre. More importantly, both the films were adapted from true accounts of escapes that had occurred in the same camp — Stalag Luft 3.

In addition, the timing of the two stories was interwoven. The three tunnels dug for what became the Great Escape — in anticipation of releasing several hundred prisoners — were started in early April 1943, and, whilst maximum co-ordinated effort was going into this mass escape, the 'X' committee, running the operation, recognised that there would still have to be other independent escape attempts so that camp activity would appear normal to the Germans. It was the Wooden Horse tunnel, dug in the summer of 1943, that fell into this category.

THE WOODEN HORSE

The Wooden Horse began as a book written by Flight Lieutenant Eric Williams, in which he recounted his own successful escape from the camp via a tunnel disguised by a wooden vaulting horse.

Production of the picture took place through the autumn of 1949 and, because the war had only been over for four years, it was therefore no revelation that of the twelve principal actors, all had been in the armed services, with three having been PoWs in reality.

The film's producer, Ian Dalrymple, having spent 25 years in the film industry as an editor, writer, director and producer, had been appointed producer for the Crown Film Unit in August 1940, and it was under his auspices that such wartime classics as *Target For Tonight*, *Fires Were Started*, *London Can Take It*, and *Coastal Command* had been produced.

Jack Lee — director of *The Wooden Horse* — had also been with the Crown Film Unit; he had edited *London Can Take It*, and co-directed *Coastal Command* and *Ordinary People*, amongst others.

The production plan was to build a replica of Stalag Luft 3 on location in Germany, and to shoot both exterior and interior scenes within it, weather permitting; to shoot other location scenes as required in Germany and Denmark, and to finish the picture in England at Shepperton Studios — principally the tunnelling scenes. Overall, about two thirds of the film was shot on location.

A section of Lüneburg Heath near the town of Soltau became the site for the replica prison camp — the location of the original being within the Soviet Zone at this time. Built and finished entirely with German labour, the project provided a temporary boost to the local economy. Art director William Kellner was assisted in the design of the set by the film's technical adviser, Wing Commander Ralph Ward, who had spent three years in Stalag Luft 3. He was also given a part in the picture as 'Stafford' the adjutant. Eric Williams — having been granted extended leave by his employers — was also on hand to give technical advice.

Eric Williams (holding file) with members of the cast and crew recreating *The Wooden Horse* in the replica camp built in 1949 at Soltau on Lüneburg Heath. L-R: Anthony Steel (playing Michael Codner but named 'John' in the film); director Jack Lee; Leo Genn, portraying Eric Williams ('Peter'); Williams; and technical adviser Wing Commander Ralph Ward who also appears in the film as the character 'Stafford'.

Crowd scenes within the compound — the 'Appells' in particular — were done with the aid of BAOR personnel, and men from RAF units. With the reduction of the Berlin Airlift, some officers gave up their leave to populate the camp, and other aircrews were granted special leave to become 'PoWs' by the AOC-in-C of the British Air Forces of Occupation, Air Marshal Thomas Williams. At one point, the production could boast seven ex-PoWs reliving past experiences in the replica stalag.

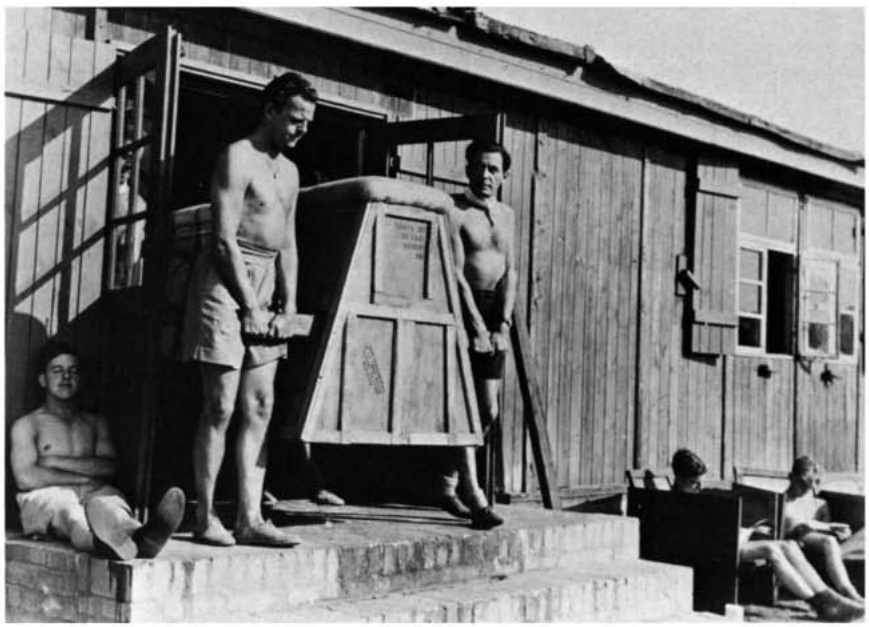
Casting the German rôles in the script was difficult; the producers wanted to use German actors, but in 1949 this was not easy in the occupied zone, due to a lack of intake into the profession over recent years. Consequently, with the exception of Franz Schafheitlin who played the camp commandant, it was necessary to cast from type: for example, Hans Meyer, who played Charlie, the head 'ferret', had once served in a German cavalry regiment, and was currently employed as a clerk with a British army unit. Officers and guards in the camp were played by ex-members of the Wehrmacht but, in the event, such authenticity was spoilt by the use of indifferent German uniforms — the real thing, not surprisingly, being unavailable in Germany at that time.

The principal street scenes after the escape were photographed in Lübeck. In reality this part of the story had taken place in Stettin but, like the real Stalag Luft 3, this town was also in the Soviet Zone. It was in the Lübeck sequence that a young Walter Gotell appeared — referred to in the cast list only as 'The Follower'. Due to his huge frame and menacing Slavic appearance, he subsequently enjoyed a rich career, playing both German or Russian 'heavies' — and became an essential 'face' in the Bond films.

As with Eric Williams' book, the names of the principal characters in the script (written in collusion with Dalrymple and Lee) were changed; consequently it was as 'Peter' that Leo Genn in effect portrayed Williams, and as 'John' that Anthony Steel played Williams' co-escapee, Michael Codner. David Tomlinson was cast as 'Phil', the third member of the escape.

Also included in the picture was a brief impersonation of the man who built the vaulting horse. He was Wing Commander Roger Maw, a self-appointed carpenter, and the source of much makeshift gadgetry within the camp. He was also noted for his flamboyant mode of dress. As he said: 'I thought I'd dress like a foreigner so that I wouldn't be noticed if I had to bale out. But I must have been dressed as the wrong sort of foreigner!' Indeed, he was: when captured he was wearing a bright yellow shirt with a large red handkerchief, grey flannel trousers, Egyptian sandals and pink socks. As with other real-life characters portrayed in the picture, Maw's name was changed, becoming 'Wings' Cameron, played by Russell Waters.

When *The Wooden Horse* was released at the end of July 1950, it met with general approval from the critics. And being the first of the genre, it could not fall foul of critical comparison with other escape pictures.



Left: **The third escaper, Oliver Philpot, simply 'Phil' in the film, was played by David Tomlinson seen carrying the vaulting horse with Leo Genn. The original horse had been built by Wing Commander Roger Maw** *(right)* **who had been shot down in August 1942 in the Western Desert while commanding No. 108 Squadron and sent to Stalag Luft 3 (not 'III' as painted on the sign over the entrance to the film camp shown on the previous page). Roger Maw died in August 1992 — his obituary in *The Times* described how the escape was inspired by Homer's story of how the Greeks used a wooden horse to infiltrate the city of Troy. 'The Stalag Luft 3 PoWs conceived the idea of using a vaulting-horse as a visual and psychological cover for the digging of an underground escape route. The camp carpenter declined to participate in the project, on the grounds that his equipment had been obtained on trust from the German authorities and was vital for the maintenance of camp morale. So Roger Maw — who had studied carpentry at school, had once built a three-wheel car and was a constant source of make-shift gadgetry in the camp — was recruited to construct the vaulting-horse.'**

'Using scrapwood, pieces of Red Cross food-parcel crates and the ends of beams surreptitiously sawn from the roofs of huts, he built a vaulting-frame which stood 4ft 6ins high and had a base covering an area of 5ft by 3ft. It was carried out each day to a point close to the camp perimeter wire and then used — in full view of the guards — ostensibly to improve the fitness of the prisoners. But while the prisoners' 'athletics team' performed their gymnastic routines, jumping and somersaulting on and over the vaulting-horse, fellow PoWs — hidden one by one in the horse — were secretly tunnelling to freedom underneath. They painstakingly dug their way towards the outside world before returning to the horse, ready to be carried back to their huts, minutes before the exercise period ended. The soil they removed as they tunnelled was meticulously collected and stored alongside the men as they were carried back. They used Maws's tools. He, meanwhile, had fashioned a replica set to display and fool the guards. Three prisoners managed to escape: Maw and the other members of the escape committee remained in the camp for another two years until liberated in 1945.'

Below: **The escape took place from the eastern end of the East Compound (see page 2) and Jan Heitmann visited the area in August 1991 when it was still a restricted military training area. 'Just like during the war, the warning signs reminded us that we were entering a military area and that we were "in danger of death" ', said Jan. 'Having been in military service in Germany, I knew that even in democratic states it can be dangerous to enter restricted military areas and we did not know for sure the attitude of the Poles. In the old days, their soldiers would not have hesitated to fire at invaders like us without warning. Now we hoped that they would give us a chance to surrender and explain before they brought their rifles to the ready. Knowing that at around 6 p.m. a good soldier is having his supper, I returned at about 5.30 p.m. I reached the camp area but then saw a Polish military truck emerging from the forest and turning my way. We took to our heels and managed to get to the car just in time. However, there were still photos to be taken so, with a throbbing heart, we returned two hours later. Fortunately we were not disturbed again.'**

The Great Escape **camp near Munich in 1962. Although this picture displays art director Fernando Carrere's replica 'Stalag Luft North' to good effect, it bore little relation to the layout of the real Stalag Luft 3.**

THE GREAT ESCAPE

The Great Escape, on the other hand, whilst fêted by many for its scale and spectacle, was also criticised for its very predictability, coming as it did in the wake of so many prison camp pictures.

For writer Paul Brickhill, *The Great Escape* was his third book to be adapted for the big screen — the other two being *The Dam Busters* (1954) — see *After the Battle* No. 10 — and *Reach For The Sky* (1956) — see *After the Battle* No. 35.

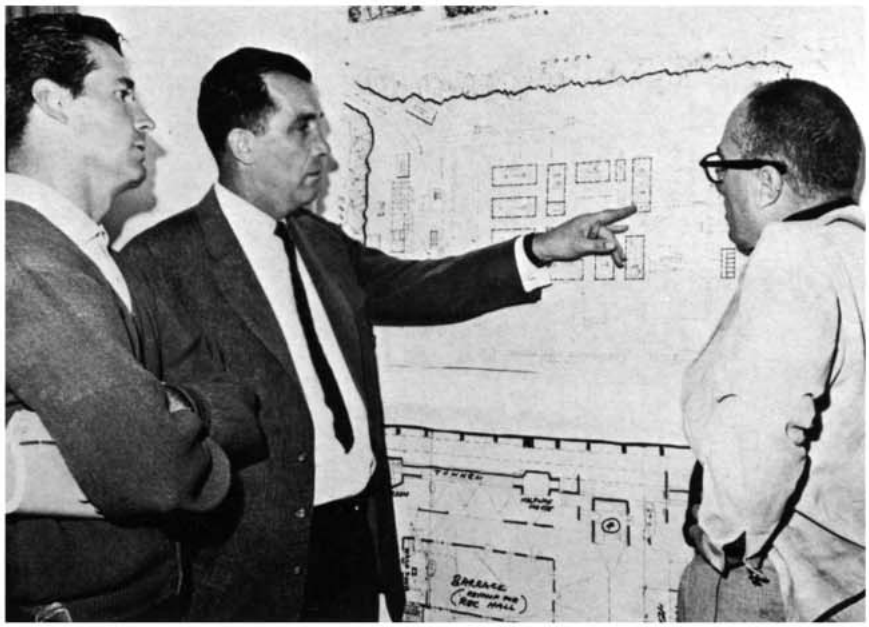
The beginnings of the book had been both unexpected and violent for Brickhill: on patrol over Tunisia in March 1943, a burst of fire from an enemy fighter had shattered the tail section of his Spitfire. He baled out and had the bad luck to parachute into the middle of a minefield. Taken into custody, he eventually finished up in Stalag Luft 3, and once there was drawn into the 'X' organisation, though Brickhill was denied his chance at freedom because he (together with three or four others) suffered from claustrophobia, and thus could not be allowed into the tunnel.

Producer/director John Sturges had bought the rights to Brickhill's book on behalf of himself and the Mirisch Corporation. He was well regarded for his films *Gunfight at the OK Corral, Bad Day at Black Rock* and *The Magnificent Seven*; in fact, three of the seven — Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson and James Coburn — played in *The Great Escape* alongside a predominantly British cast, in what was essentially a British story, though the latter pair played a Pole and an Australian respectively.

As with *The Wooden Horse*, Sturges' picture was photographed in Germany — during the summer of 1962 — utilising a specially built replica of the camp (called Stalag Luft North in the script) at a location near Munich. All the camp exteriors were shot here, with all the interiors being filmed at the Bavaria Studios, Munich. The Geiselgasteig area, with its magnificent mountain backdrop, also near Munich, was used for some exteriors — notably the now famous motorcycle chase featuring Steve McQueen.

By all accounts the motorcycle chase was not in the original script: the intended climax to the film was to be the shooting of the 50 Allied officers. McQueen's character was supposed to catch a train at Sagan along with a number of other escapees, but reportedly it was at a script conference, presided over by John Sturges, that McQueen proposed his escape by motorcycle. Sturges was receptive and, following a demonstration of riding skills by McQueen, agreed to a rewrite, in spite of potential insurance problems.

McQueen's prowess with a motorcycle was well known to his fans, and it soon became a 'fact' that he had done all the riding for the chase — the final leap over the barbed wire in particular. The way that the chase was photographed — invariably long shots bringing the rider from background into deep foreground — confirms that McQueen was doing the riding. However, that final leap over the wire has since been credited to two other riders. Malachy McCoy, McQueen's biographer, claims it for British scrambler



Wally Floody, the ex-PoW who was chief of tunnelling in 1943 (see page 4) and acted as technical adviser to the production, makes a point to producer/director John Sturges while James Garner, who plays 'Hendley' the scrounger, looks on.

Floody and Sturges discuss the finer points of the warning wire with Charles Bronson, John Leyton (in cap) and James Coburn who portray the three successful escapees (Jens Muller, Per Bergsland and Bram van der Stok). Lawrence Montaigne, who plays 'Haynes', a Canadian airman, and German actor Til Kiwe (previously seen in *The Longest Day* as Rommel's aide, Hellmuth Lang), stand on the right.

The 'penguin' method of sand dispersal, using sacks, which could be opened with a cord while hanging inside a prisoner's trousers, being demonstrated for Wally Floody's approval (see page 7).

Jeff Smith, but the popular consensus is that American Bud Ekins did it. He said he sold the bikes after the stunt.

Other than McQueen, playing Virgil Hilts 'The Cooler King', the film's two other principal performers were James Garner — known then for his rôle as TV's gambler Brett Maverick — and Richard Attenborough, who played 'Big X'. All the names of the real participants in the escape were changed in the film for dramatic considerations — or because of variations from fact. As a result, Attenborough's character — the key figure in the story — was changed from Squadron Leader Roger Bushell to Bartlett. Bushell's sister, Elizabeth, said of the actor's portrayal: '[Roger] had tremendous charisma — he wasn't a bit like the dour and short Richard Attenborough'. Group Captain Douglas Bader, who had been in Stalag Luft 3 prior to the break-out, enjoyed Attenborough's performance, but added that 'to anyone who knew Roger, an outstanding escaper, and a great organiser of escapes generally, the part must seem badly written'.

As with some of the cast of *The Wooden Horse,* the actor Donald Pleasence came to *The Great Escape* as an ex-PoW. As a Flying Officer serving as a wireless operator with No. 166 Squadron, operating Lancasters, he

Left: **The most successful trapdoor was that concealing 'Dick' in Hut 122. Its ingenious 'water trap' is recreated quite well . . . as is 'Harry's beneath the stove in Hut 104** *right* **although the hut numbers and tunnel names are confused in the film.**

'Sagan' railway station the morning after the break-out. Due to the tunnel running short of the trees, and the resultant congestion, many escapees missed their appointed train, with the consequence that they were left hanging around on the platforms. L-R: David McCallum as 'Ashley-Pitt'; James Garner ('Hendley') with Donald Pleasence ('Blythe'); and Lawrence Montaigne ('Haynes') with Tom Adams ('Nimmo').

'Herr Bartlett? Your German is good . . . and I hear also your French. Your arms up!' Karl Otto Alberty apprehends Richard Attenborough's Squadron Leader Bartlett. Alberty was one of a number of German actors who won a brief kind of fame as regulars in the American-made war epics of the 'sixties, appearing in *Battle of the Bulge* (1965), *Battle of Britain* (1969), and *Kelly's Heroes* (1970).

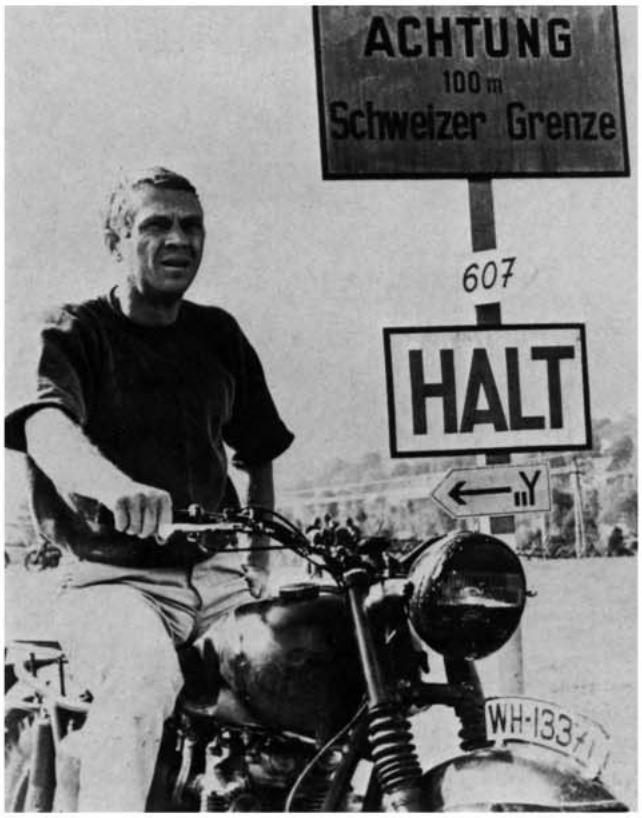
had been shot down on August 31, 1944 and taken prisoner. Pleasence plays the mild, inoffensive 'Colin Blythe', the 'X' committee's master forger, who loses his sight due to overwork preparing the mass of documents required for the escape. Taken under the wing of James Garner ('Hendley'), he is fatally shot after the light aircraft in which they are flying force-lands with engine trouble.

And it is the death of the harmless and helpless 'Blythe', blended with the deep remorse of 'Hendley', that produces a great and poignant moment in the picture, which up to that point is something of a schoolboy romp. It is the combination of this scene and McQueen's motorcycle antics which smothers the film's original climax — the murder of the 50 officers.

The Great Escape had its London premiere at the Odeon, Leicester Square on June 20, 1963. At this time, Steve McQueen was also featuring in another war picture, *The War Lover* — a deep love story, with the USAAF operating B-17s in England on the periphery.

Reporting for the *News of the World*, Douglas Bader wrote of *The Great Escape* that 'it is one of the best war films I have seen . . . and basically the film is true.' Speaking of Hannes Messemer's sympathetic performance as the camp commandant, he added: 'He is portrayed as a decent chap but I must confess that in the seven camps in which I was incarcerated, I never met one like him!'

Both *The Wooden Horse* and *The Great Escape* are seen from time to time on British television — particularly the latter which seemed to be aired during every Christmas holiday through the 1970s. However, *The Great Escape*, like so many wide-screen pictures, gets a rough deal on TV, being panned and scanned for a full screen image from grainy, and sometimes damaged, prints. As a consequence, about one third of the picture information is lost. The films are both presently available on video, with *The Great Escape* now released in a Special Collectors' wide-screen edition on both video and laser disc. Therefore, the best option for anyone interested in seeing these films in a pristine condition is to invest in the videos. After all, the pictures do represent the beginning and the end of the 'escape' genre of war films, and as such deserve a place in any video collection.



Unforgettable, even if not true. Steve McQueen seen as he is best remembered — as 'Hilts' the cooler king, the man who tried to outrun his pursuers and leap into Switzerland on a stolen German motorcycle. And it is this frenetic chase for which the film is primarily remembered. Exciting as it undeniably is, it is perhaps unfortunate that a picture which purports to relate (albeit dramatically enhanced) actual events should be hailed instead for a wholly fictitious episode introduced into the screenplay by one of the film's 'stars'. Two cycles were used: both British-made 1961 650cc Triumph models mocked up to represent the German army BMW machines, which were too heavy and rigid to make the jump safely.

THE GREAT ESCAPE PLUS 50

By Jan Bartelski

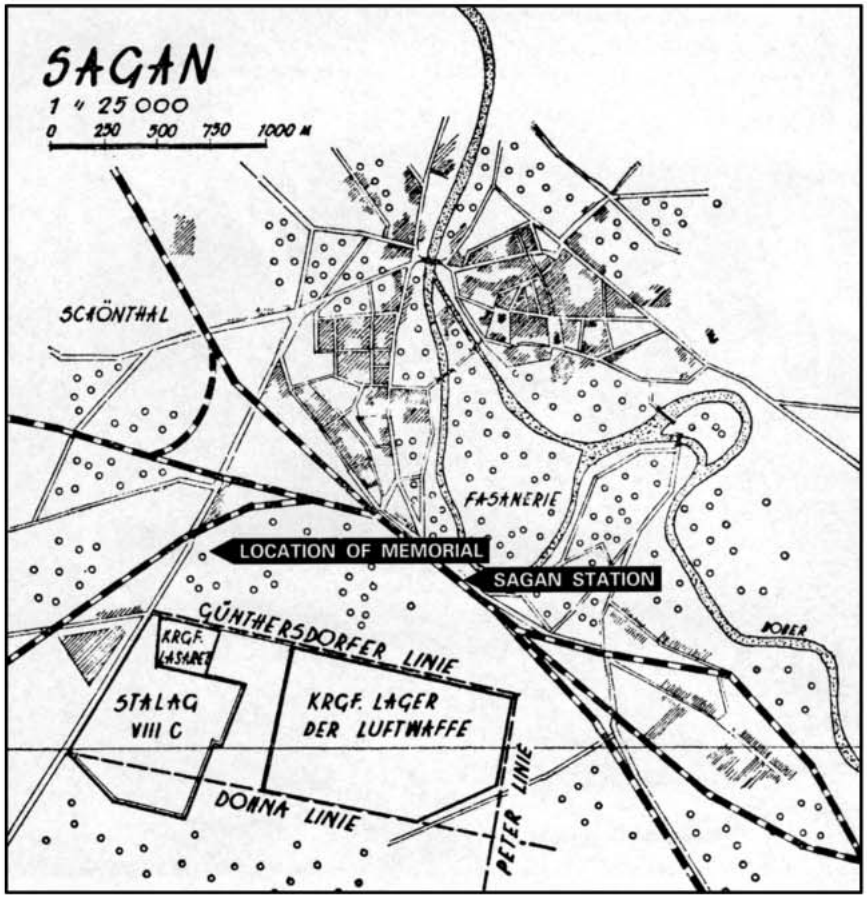
On March 28, 1994, 50 'pilgrims' set off from London City Airport on a sentimental return journey to Sagan but, from the 15 survivors of the Gestapo massacre still alive, only seven were able to make it. They were Sydney Dowse, Dennis Plunkett, Les Brodrick, Desmond Neely, Ray Wymeersch, Ivo Tonder and Bob Nelson. The rest consisted of other former inmates of Stalag Luft 3 or relatives of the murdered airmen. The 'pilgrims' had gathered from all over the world: from Australia, Britain, Canada, France, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The visit was organised by Andrew Wiseman, a former RAF navigator, himself an inmate of the camp. Andy, a retired BBC producer, visited Sagan three times previously in conjunction with the BBC 2 programme about the Great Escape, 'Going Underground', and was thus very knowledgeable and well able to guide the tour.

I was the only one without any connection with Stalag Luft 3 and I joined the pilgrimage at the suggestion of my old friend, Bob Nelson. A former colleague at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Bob insisted that as Sagan is now in Poland, he needed help with the language and, anyway, it was time for me to look up the country of my birth after quite a few years of absence. Moreover, there was an obligation to remember the six Polish airmen victims so, when the Polish Air Force Association of Great Britain learnt of my intention to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Great Escape, I was appointed their official representative. But, at that time, an obscure town in western Poland, now called Zagan, meant little to me.

A quick look at the map revealed that Zagan lies only 100 miles south-east of Berlin as the crow flies. Before the war, it was in German hands, therefore it never appeared in my geography books, but in 1945, with a stroke of Stalin's pen, the borders of Poland were shifted westwards and Zagan found itself in new hands. The entire German population was packed onto lorries and transferred to the DDR. New settlers, mainly from the part of Poland taken over by the USSR, began to drift in.

If one discounts the 80th man caught in the tunnel entrance and the three men who were captured after having just emerged, 76 prisoners escaped from the camp. There were therefore 26 survivors including the three who successfully made home runs to Britain (see page 19). Fifty years later, 15 members of the exclusive Great Escape 'club' were still alive, of whom seven were able to take part in an 'away run' back to the camp. As a memorial service had already been organised for the exact anniversary on Friday, March 24, at the RAF church of St Clement Danes in London, the trip to Poland took place the following Monday. *Top:* **Pictured beside a model of the North Compound in the Martyrdom Museum at Sagan are (L–R) Dennis Plunkett, Sydney Dowse, Ivo Tonder (Czechoslovakia), Ray van Wymeersch (France), Les Brodrick, and Bob Nelson.** *Above:* **The museum, built on the site of Stalag VIIIC, has very few exhibits on the Great Escape although the balance is due to be redressed. (All pictures by Julian Wiseman and Jan Bartelski.)**



After the war, Silesia was ceded to Poland under the terms of the Potsdam Agreement. Most of the German population emigrated to Germany or was forced to leave and was largely replaced by Poles. The area, today Polish Slask, is corresponding to the modern Polish provinces of Wroclaw (formerly Breslau), Opole (formerly Oppeln), and Katowice (formerly Kattowitz). On this German plan of 1943, Stalag Luft 3 is designated 'KR[iegs]G[e]F[angenen] LAGER DER LUFTWAFFE'. (OKBZH Archives)

The whole area west of the pre-war German-Polish border was now renamed 'The Recovered Territories', as parts had belonged to Poland a few centuries back, although this description could hardly apply to Zagan with its multi-national heritage.

At Berlin's Tempelhof Airport, we boarded a Polish bus and two locally rented cars. I was assigned to one car, my companions being Nick Pollet, Rex Austen from Australia, and Dr Eric Stephenson. On crossing the Polish border, one could not help being amazed by the queues of lorries, several miles long, waiting on both sides for customs clearance. The lorries were doubled up on the motorway with only a narrow lane left for passing traffic.

My first surprise on noticing the name Żagań on a road sign was that with the 'Z' and 'n' having accents above them, it should really be pronounced Dgagan, the 'D' spoken softly and the 'n' at the end sounding like the 'n' in Compiégne. However, all my efforts to teach my companions a proper pronunciation were in vain, and to the veteran PoWs it will always be plain 'Sagan'.

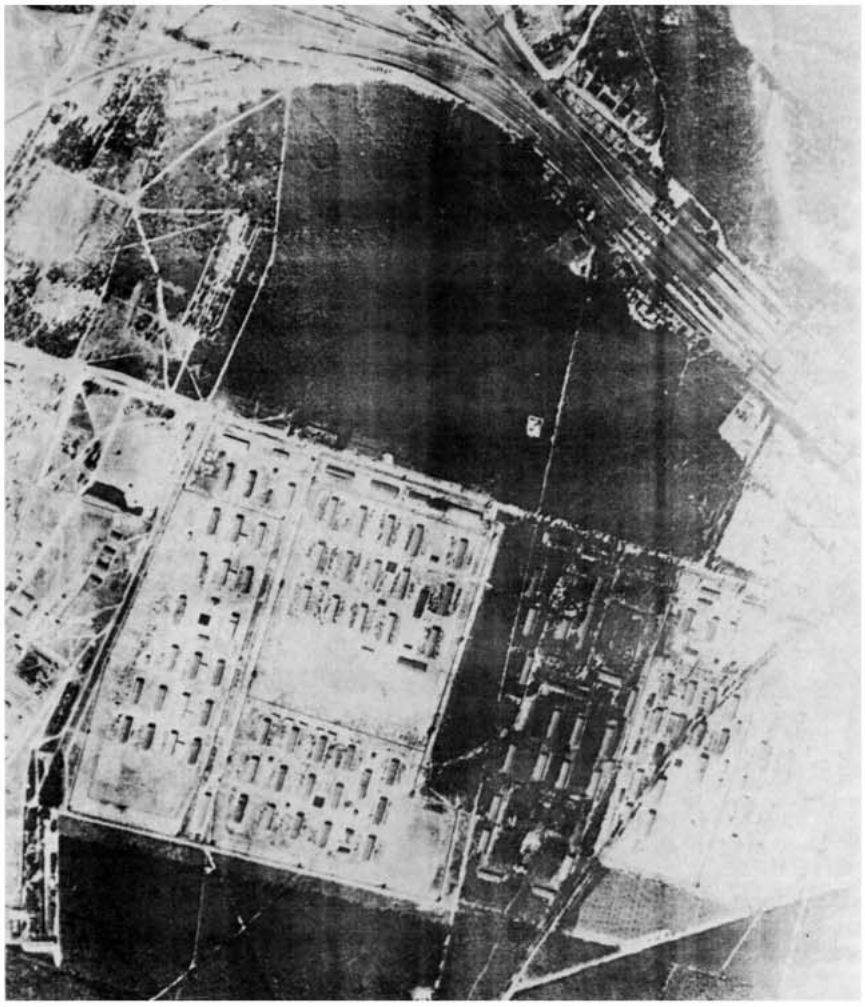
On approaching the town, it became evident why in 1939 this area had been selected for a mammoth complex of PoW camps. A sandy infertile soil, lacking agriculture, and with only an occasional patch of thin forest, offered few opportunities for prisoners on the run to hide.

Bob Nelson was right about needing an interpreter. Apart from Andy Wiseman, whose parents are Polish, I was the only one who was able to communicate with the hotel staff. The building was very old and, by Western standards, austere, and somewhat dilapidated, but it still possessed a certain aura.

All our dinners and lunches were arranged in the Officers' Mess of the Polish 11th Armoured Division, as it was the only place large enough to cater for the whole group.

A comprehensive programme was arranged for our two-day stay. It began with a visit to the Martyrdom Museum of Allied PoWs. The local authorities treated the presence of the former inmates of Stalag Luft 3 with great reverence. All traffic on the road from Zagan to the museum, situated about two kilometres away, was halted until our convoy had passed, a gesture which greatly impressed the 'pilgrims'. The museum, opened in 1971, is situated on the site of Stalag VIIIC, the first camp to be erected in this area in 1939. Originally, the museum was mainly dedicated to the 50,000 Russian prisoners who died in the camp from starvation and ill-treatment, and most of the exhibits reflect their fate. A large map displayed on one wall showed the complex of various camps and its satellites with a peak capacity of 300,000. Stalag Luft 3, with just over 10,000 airmen, appears to have been a drop in the ocean.

The curator apologised for the lack of exhibits depicting Stalag Luft 3 and, after taking me on one side, in guarded words he explained that the 'previous' authorities, meaning the Communist government, did not attach much importance to the memories of what they regarded as a camp for 'imperialistic officers'. However, he said that efforts



had been made recently to remedy the situation, but, as the area where Stalag Luft 3 was located had been under strict army control until two years before, with no one allowed to visit the area, there had not been much time to comb it properly for relics. Fortunately, some of the ex-PoWs had brought their own mementoes which they donated to the museum or had photocopied for display.

After the visit, we departed for the nearby military cemetery where an official ceremony was scheduled to take place. Here stands the impressive monument erected to commemorate the massacre of the airmen, and other memorials are dedicated to the inmates of Stalag VIIIC and another to the victims of World War I.

The ceremony was arranged by the 11th Armoured Division, which has its headquarters in Zagan, and was attended by all its high-ranking officers, the Mayor of Zagan, and many local organisations, including school children. After the laying of numerous wreaths, a roll-call of the dead followed. As the names were read out by John Casson, a former Fleet Air Arm lieutenant commander, the assembled soldiers responded with 'Let them rest in peace' in Polish. John, son of Dame Sybil Thorndike, the famous actress, was a leading figure in the camp's theatrical activities. The ceremony ended with a rifle volley but, as the soldiers cocked their weapons, which happened to be aimed in our direction, some of the 'pilgrims' must have recollected how often the German guards also pointed their weapons at them near this spot. Luckily, the rifles were quickly lifted above their heads and fired, leaving all of us greatly relieved.

The memorial in the foreground is inscribed 'Erected by the prisoners of war of the Allied Air Forces in honoured memory of their comrades who died at Stalag Luft 3 during the war, AD1939 194– Per Ardua ad Astra'.

Back where it all started — the site of Hut 104. Now all seven escapers (including Desmond Neely, missing in the picture on page 21) are assembled together on the spot where they made their bid for freedom 50 years before.

The next item on our itinerary was for the former inmates of Stalag Luft 3 to inspect what remained of the North Compound where 50 years ago 'Harry' had led some of them to a glimpse of freedom. Again, all traffic was stopped as we drove to the remains of the camp. However, the first impression was disappointing. The site, overgrown by silver birches, displayed hardly any evidence of the former camp, and nothing appeared to be left of the barracks, the guard-houses or the fences. Luckily, Sydney Dowse, who had visited Zagan with the BBC crew, was able to point out what remained of the famous Hut 104, and he and the other six survivors gathered round the remaining bricks of the stove base, under which the tunnel was started, for a photograph.

Later, we drove to the railway station. Unlike the virtual extinction of Stalag Luft 3, the station, the last landmark to all PoWs on the way to captivity, was a more familiar sight because nothing had changed since the wartime days, and we were shown the famous ticket office, situated in a passage under the rail tracks, where the lucky ones bought their train tickets after the Great Escape.

In the afternoon, the pilgrims were treated to a tour of the old Talleyrand castle, now Zagan's Palace of Culture. We found the Palace in immaculate condition, a contrast to the town which still displays many wartime scars. A specially-arranged concert was an indication of the important rôle music plays

The railway station — the main route used by many of the escapers to get away from Sagan — lies just a quarter of a mile north of the camp.

in Polish life. In the evening, a banquet was held in honour of the 'pilgrims' by Mayor Janusz Bujak. Considering that Zagan is a small town with only 28,000 inhabitants, the financial burden of this one event must have absorbed quite a large part of the Mayor's allocation for his PR duties.

Next morning was left free for our own activities. A bus tour of the town was arranged for those who wanted to see something of Zagan, but on my car companions' minds was only one urge — another visit to Stalag Luft 3. A second inspection of the North Compound proved much more revealing. This time, we identified the brick foundations on which the wooden huts and the theatre had been erected, and it was even possible to locate the fire pool, although it now looked much smaller than their memories had recalled. One discovery was very, very exciting — a shallow dip which had developed in the road running along the North Compound. With the tunnel exit having been blown up by the Germans shortly

Although the main entrance lay north of the line, the prisoners knew that a rear entrance *(left)* led via a subway under the tracks to the booking hall *(right)*. However, the subway was protected by a storm porch and, in the darkness, most of the escapers could not find the entrance. In June 1944, *After the Battle* reader Peter Bradley travelled all the way from Australia to picture the station, including the porch on the south side, on his own 50th anniversary tour to Europe.

Left: **Nick Pollet, a former Stalag Luft 3 inmate but not one of the Great Escapers, found this electrical insulator in the undergrowth, but an amazing discovery was this dip in the road** *(right)* **where 'Harry' has subsided.** *Below:* **Of the camp itself, only rubble from the footings of the huts remains, the whole area now being covered with new tree growth.**

after the Great Escape, the section of the tunnel beneath the road would have collapsed. The dip could be noticed thanks to the recent rains which had deposited dark silt in the depression in the asphalt surface. My companions found the discovery so absorbing that they were prepared to forego lunch, and Nick Pollet was also rewarded by his perseverance in combing the undergrowth under the silver birches when he found a porcelain insulator on which electric wires were strung to stop escapes over the fence.

It is not easy to piece together what had happened to Stalag Luft 3 and the other camps after the war. Zagan was overrun by the Red Army in January 1945 and there are many signs that fighting actually took place right on the site by the remains of numerous trenches. Later, German prisoners-of-war were kept in the camp until they were transferred to Russia. When the Polish population started to move in, with a dire shortage of fuel, the barracks were most likely torn down for firewood and anything of value stolen.

That afternoon, we left for Poznan to attend a ceremony scheduled for the next morning at the British Military Cemetery where the ashes of the airmen shot by the Gestapo are now interred. Again, the local authorities attached great importance to our visit, and the bus was met by a police car on the city outskirts and escorted to our hotel, where we were met by members of the diplomatic corps from several nations.

The British Military Cemetery is located in a park dedicated to the wartime Polish-Soviet brotherhood-in-arms, next to a cemetery for Soviet soldiers. This time the predominant military contingent came from the Polish Air Force in Poznan, but all civil and ex-combatant organisations were represented, including the Polish Underground.

The 'pilgrims' were overwhelmed by their reception in Poland which seemed to echo an old Polish proverb — 'Guest home, God home', and local newspapers and radio were full of reports of the 50th anniversary of this historic event, in a surprising revelation of just how much the country revered the Great Escape.

Above: **But during Peter Bradley's exploration of the area, he came up with an even more amazing discovery: the 'cooler'!**

Overleaf: **The graves in Poznan — the former Prussian town of Posen — last resting place of the dead since 1948.**

THE HIGH WYCOMBE AIR HEADQUARTERS

Royal Air Force Bomber Command was formed on July 14, 1936, its first Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief being Sir John Steel, with its initial headquarters at Uxbridge, in west London. Just over a year later, in September 1937, command passed to Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt who returned from India to take up the appointment while a permanent site was sought for a headquarters for the new command.

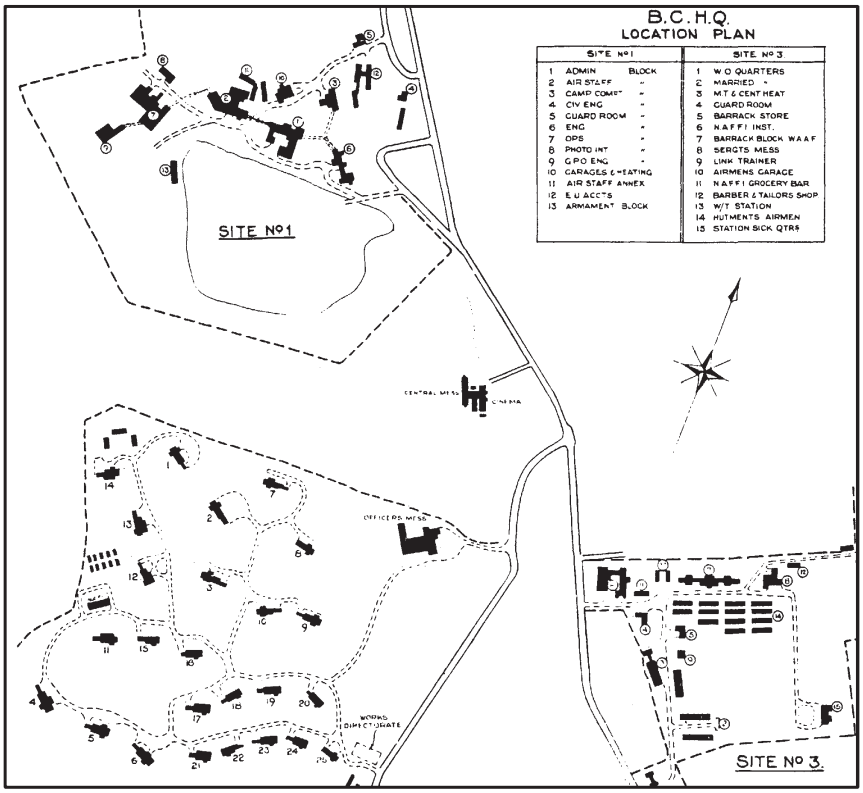
As one of the main RAF training depots, Uxbridge was required for the induction of new recruits, so Bomber Command found temporary accommodation in Bridge House in Richlings Park, Langley, Buckinghamshire, with additional space being found at the nearby Actors' Orphanage which was also requisitioned. Meanwhile, the search was on for a suitable site for a permanent headquarters.

'SOUTHDOWN'

The siting of the Bomber Command HQ at High Wycombe is supposed to have stemmed from a chance remark by Wing Commander Alan Oakeshott who was working at the Air Ministry when the search for a location was being undertaken. The Wing Commander had grown up in the village of Naphill, in the Chiltern Hills, where his father was a prominent local landowner, and he suggested that as the HQ had to be in southern England and well screened by trees, the wooded slopes of the Chilterns around Walters Ash would be ideal. Not only was the area remote, but it lacked significant features when observed from the air which would make it difficult for an enemy to spot. He backed up his suggestions with photographs and a decision was soon made by the Directorate of Works to build at Walters Ash.

Before the Second World War, the Buckinghamshire town of High Wycombe, 30 miles north-west of London, was known mainly for its chair-making industry. This had become established in the area because of the extensive beech woods in the region, but the town's seclusion in the rolling Chiltern Hills also made it an attractive proposition when RAF Bomber Command began its search for a suitable location for its headquarters. A site was selected north of the town at Walter's Ash (more commonly spelt now as Walters Ash) where the road from Naphill runs beside Park Wood. This tree cover was maintained as far as possible during the building works which commenced in November 1938. *Top:* **Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, AOC-in-C Bomber Command from 1942 to 1945, escorts the Duchess of Gloucester, centre, Air Chief Commandant of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, on a visit to Bomber Command headquarters with the Senior WAAF Staff Officer, Group Officer L. M. Crowther. (IWM)** *Above:* **In April 1968, Bomber Command merged with Fighter Command to become Strike Command when the office block on the right was constructed for an administrative HQ for the new command.**

Right: **Early plan of the layout of Site No. 1 comprising the administrative area; Site No. 2, the Officers' Mess and accommodation; and Site No. 3, NCOs', WAAFs' and airmen's quarters.**



Below: **Aerial picture taken soon after the post-war merger into Strike Command. The NATO Underground Permanent War Headquarters was constructed just north of the wartime Bomber Command Operations Centre.**

preservation of tree cover. Each tree was numbered so that every possible advantage could be gained from using natural camouflage, Any trees affected by the building work were supported, and several new coppices planted. Grim's Dyke, a ditched mound dating from around the 5th century which lay in the compound, was also preserved.

Site No. 1 was used for the command, administrative and office buildings, interconnected by underground tunnels which were also to act as service ducts. Nearly 29,000 cubic feet of spoil were excavated to construct the underground operations block, sited 50 feet below ground. It required the provision of 8,800 yards of waterproof concrete and 200 tons of reinforcement. The overhead protection was 20-foot-thick, comprising a 5ft 6in roof slab covered by a layer of ballast, then a second 2ft layer of concrete topped with a 4ft layer of earth. On top of this, a 5ft reinforced concrete 'burster' slab extended beyond the walls of the actual building to detonate a direct hit. The whole was covered with earth and grassed over. Armed guards patrolled the workings from January 1940.

Site No. 2 was located in a partial clearing between Yewtree Hill Plantation and Falconer's Hill Wood. A wide avenue, known as the Queen's Ride, crossed the area, which had been established to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth I. Now, officers' married quarters were built together with a traditional pre-war-style officers' mess although this was adapted to look like a manor house standing in its own garden. The airmen's living quarters were grouped on Site No. 3, including the sick quarters and NAAFI.

A house called Springfields at Great Kingshill, some five miles east of High Wycombe, was requisitioned in February 1940 for the personal residence of the AOC-in-C, a direct line being installed from there to the operations room.

The GPO began the installation of the communications equipment in October 1939, although extensive delays during the winter postponed a planned occupation date from the first week in February 1940 to March 12. The move from Richlings Park was completed by the afternoon of the 15th, the new code-name for the headquarters at Walters Ash being 'Southdown'. The first camp commandant was Wing Commander H. Dawes.

On April 3, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal took over from Air Chief Marshal Ludlow-Hewitt. The new commander flew over the site to inspect its camouflage and promptly ordered that all the flat concrete roofs must be camouflaged. He was also concerned about the well-worn footpaths leading to the anti-aircraft emplacements sited nearby which would give the game away to an astute enemy photo-interpreter.

Above: **The guardroom to site No. 3 shortly after its completion by John Laing and Son with its old-style telephone boxes.** *Below:* **The same view is now somewhat obscured by the erection in the early 1990s — as an increased security measure — of a Yarnold Sangar — the circular prefabricated pillboxes named after the squadron leader from the RAF Regiment who hit on the idea of having them assembled from separate concrete segments.**

On the outbreak of war, on paper, Bomber Command consisted of 55 squadrons split into six groups, although there were no reserves and no training organisation. When ten squadrons were despatched to France, they became known as the Advanced Air Striking Force, comprising two wings of light bombers, mainly Blenheims and Battles. However, at that stage, British-based bombers were only permitted to drop propaganda leaflets or carry out restricted attacks on naval targets.

In August 1940, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse took over as AOC-in-C until illness forced his replacement by Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris on February 3, 1942. Harris was a practical airman commanding No. 5 Group at the beginning of the war. Now, he was to mastermind the implementation of a new phase in air operations against Germany, the new AOC being instructed to focus his operations on the morale of the enemy civil population and, in particular, of the industrial workers.

Left: **The Air Staff Block on Site No. 1, now the headquarters of the Air Officer Administration (AOA)** *above.*

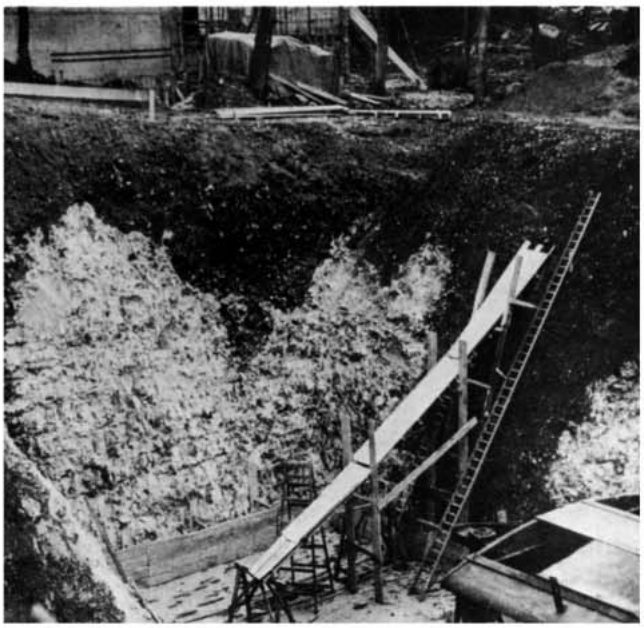
The new policy, adopted partly because of the difficulty of hitting pin-point targets at night, led to so-called 'area or carpet bombing' where whole towns were subjected to attack. Harris, himself, had had no part in the formulation of the new directive (from mid-1941 he had been in charge of the RAF delegation in Washington) yet misinformed public opinion has ever since labelled Harris as the instigator of the policy change which had already taken place when the new chief of Bomber Command arrived at High Wycombe. Nevertheless, he pursued his directive with ruthless efficiency.

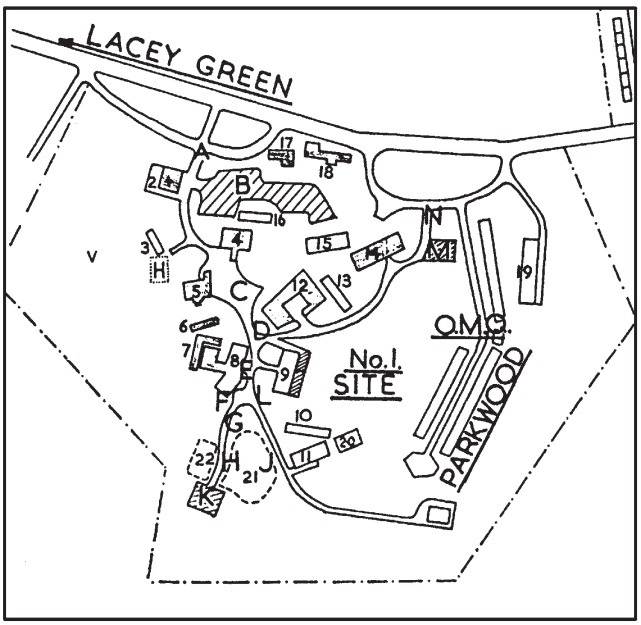
At Southdown, a new building for the Operations Research Section was opened in February and, within three months, Air Chief Marshal Harris had mounted the first 1,000-bomber raid. Then, in August, the Pathfinders were formed to direct the bomber formations into attacking the correct target and to try to improve bomb concentrations.

The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester visited the station on October 26, 1943, followed by His Majesty King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on February 7, 1944, when the workings of the Ops Room were explained to them. A year later, the Duchess of Kent made the last royal visit to High Wycombe during the war.

Although RAF Bomber Command existed for 32 years — from July 14, 1936 to April 30, 1968 — it is the tenure of its wartime chief, Sir Arthur Harris, with which the organisation is most remembered. Sir Arthur assumed command on February 3, 1942, and for the next three years he rigorously pursued the primary objective which had been given to Bomber Command, which was to focus operations 'on the morale of the enemy civil population and, in particular, of the industrial workers'. *Above:* **His office was situated at the western end of the Air Staff Block.** *Below:* **Today, it is used by the Air Officer Administration for RAF High Wycombe.**

Left: **The motor car parked outside the windows to his office is most probably Harris's. In this picture, he escorts the Duchess of Kent down the path leading to the underground operations block. (IWM)** *Above:* **Our comparison deliberately takes in a wider view to show Sir Arthur's personal exit from his office through the door in the end of the block right alongside one of the ventilation shafts to the ops block.**

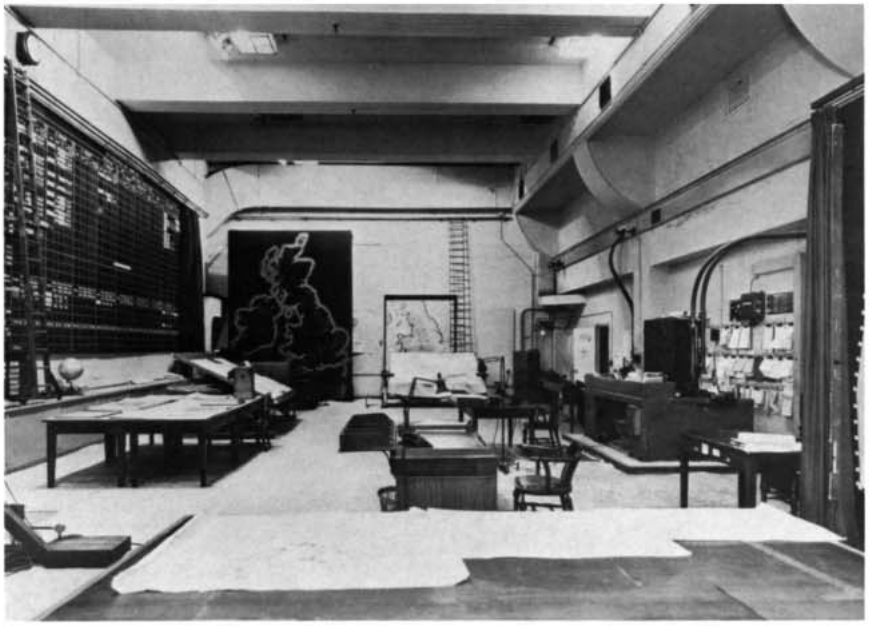




Left: **This photo, taken by Laings during construction, conveys no idea of the huge area covered by the operations block ([21] on the post-war plan *right*). The full legend reads: [1] Guard-room. [2] Map store. [3] Pavilion. [4] Unit Headquarters. [5] Workshops and Power House. [6] Yokohama House. [7] Photo-graphic Section. [8] Air Staff Block. [9] New Administrative Air Block. [10] Command Education. [11] PBX. [12] Admin Block. [13] Tokyo House. [14] Engineering Block. [15] Principal Medical Officer. [16] Vulcan House. [17] Command Works Advisor. [18] Kendall House. [19] Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. [20] Rest Room. [22] Met. Office. [A] Main Gate. [B] Car Park. [C] Flag Pole. [D] Road junction. [E] Senior Air Staff Officer entrance. [G] Gate and BCOC area. [H] BCOC officers' entrance. [J] BCOC other ranks entrance. [K] BCOC Car Park. [L] Standby road. [M] Engineering Car Park. [N] Lower gate. [H] Helicopter landing. [V] Sports fields.**

Bearing in mind that RAF High Wycombe — certainly Site No. 1 — is a top security area, we are very grateful to Strike Command, particularly its Public Relations Officer, Tim Lewis, for organising our visit. Certain areas were off limits but fortunately, because the wartime ops block is no longer in use, we were allowed inside. *Below left:* Its close proximity to Harris's office becomes clear with this comparison to Laing's picture *above* taken during the war. *Below right:* The new entrance, containing a security check area, leads to the original stairway.

After descending into the bowels of the earth, extensive office accommodation (all now empty) surrounds the holy of holies — the operations room itself. *Right:* **This shot shows the area as it appeared during the war.** *Below:* **Details from paintings on the station.**



The hub of Bomber Command headquarters was naturally the operations room, and the story is told that the staff below ground were always forewarned of the impending arrival of the AOC by the prearranged signal of sending a table-tennis ball down the Lamson pneumatic message tube!

Air Chief Marshal Harris remained in his post until September 1945 when he was replaced by Air Marshal Sir Norman Bottomley.

High Wycombe was enlarged and modernised after the war. Further land was acquired, and on April 30, 1968, Bomber Command and Fighter Command merged into Strike Command. Later, Transport and Coastal Commands joined in the general amalgamation of operations to form a single multi-rôle organisation. Today, Strike operates alongside the other two RAF commands: Personnel and Training, and Logistics.

STRIKE COMMAND

In 1978, a new underground bunker was commissioned to control the operation of Strike Command within the NATO organisation where computerisation, advanced radar systems and communications made the existing installation obsolete. A 12-acre site was selected on Hollybush Farm on the edge of the 1,100-acre Bradenham Estate, which had been given to the National Trust by Ernest Cook in 1956. Although the land bordered the existing RAF headquarters, and was bounded on two sides by existing installations, the provision of a piece of land within the Green Belt forming part of the Chiltern's area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, by an organisation dedicated to the preservation of Britain's national heritage, created an uproar. It was also said that the transfer broke the covenant under which Mr Cook had given the land to the Trust.

Updated to cater for a new potential enemy, these pictures show the facilities as they existed in September 1975.

With the commissioning of the new NATO war headquarters bunker, use of the old Bomber Command operations centre was run down. *Left:* **This is how it appeared during our visit in September 1994.** *Right:* **Also long abandoned and sealed up is this tunnel which led to the ops block from the Officers' Mess which lies several hundred yards to the east.**

The first news of the new installation came in reports in the local press and naturally members of the Trust were up in arms as it appeared that a deal had been struck behind their backs, one of the protesters, Professor George Hutchinson of Southampton University, even going so far as to say that the Trust had acted in a 'patriarchal' and 'arrogant' fashion.

In its defence, the Trust informed its members that the effects of the communications centre had been discussed at length with the local planning authority, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Parish Council, and other bodies, and had also been the subject of thorough examination by both Regional and Head Office Committees and staff.

The Trust explained that 'the land required for the construction is not distinguished. It consists of flat grazing land on a plateau, surrounded by trees and not overlooked from any vantage point. On two sides it is already bounded by the security fence and aerials of the existing RAF High Wycombe station. There are no public footpaths crossing the land, and it would be disingenuous to claim that there will be damage to the beauty of the surroundings once the period of construction and landscaping is over.'

The National Trust assured its membership that 'before even considering the details, [we] pressed the Ministry hard on the question of alternative sites, but received categorical assurance that no other suitable site for the new centre exists, and that it could not be accommodated within the boundary of the present RAF headquarters.

'Taking all these factors into account, the Trust decided just before the end of the year [1981] that it would be preferable to grant a conditional lease, rather than resist the application and start the processes of public enquiry. If the Trust had opted for the latter course, as advocated by some of its critics, it would surely have lost, for it could not have argued that the Ministry's scheme posed a lasting threat to land of outstanding merit, or to public amenity. It would have been unable to obtain the advantages for the estate which negotiating a lease has made possible. A lease gives the Trust far greater control than it would have if it had lost the land through a compulsory purchase order.'

A protest campaign was led locally by a Trust member, Mrs Audrey Urry, whose efforts produced a 3,000-signature petition, but by now it was too late. A 99-year lease

In February 1944, Sir Arthur presented his opposite number in the US Eighth Air Force, Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle, with the insignia of the Companion of the Order of the Bath — a decoration instituted in 1725 for senior officers for services in action. The ceremony was held on the forecourt of the Officers' Mess.

Strike takes over. The original AOC's Air Staff Block [1] was superseded by a utilitarian office complex [2]. The old operations block [3] has now been superseded by the NATO war headquarters constructed on land (off the picture to the left) acquired from the National Trust in a controversial deal negotiated in 1981. This picture was taken by Aerofilms in 1977.

was signed between the Trust and the Ministry of Defence in April 1982 and contractors moved into the site before the end of May. The matter was finally resolved by the Trust and English Heritage insisting that the roof of the bunker be grassed over and that a hedge be reinstated, measures which the Ministry of Defence would no doubt have undertaken anyway as an aid to camouflage.

The new four-storey bunker, officially titled the NATO Underground Permanent War Headquarters, 80 metres by 30 metres by 25 metres deep, comprised separate departments for intelligence co-ordination, processing of early-warning information, and computerised operations rooms for wartime protection, reconnaissance as well as strike missions deep within Soviet territory.

Dormitories and canteens were provided to serve the 600 staff should the underground block need to be sealed off. As well as serving as the main command centre in any future air war involving Britain, it was also capable of directing air operations for NATO from northern Norway to southern Germany and far out into the Atlantic.

High Wycombe has since been used as a Joint Headquarters (JHQ) for both Operations 'Granby' (to liberate Kuwait), and 'Haven' (to give assistance to Kurdish refugees on the Turkish/Iraqi border) and as a JHQ for Operations 'Warden' and 'Jural' (to monitor and deter air activity over northern and southern Iraq, respectively).

With the ending of the Cold War, the budget of the three services came under intense scrutiny and, early in 1994, it was announced that a new joint tri-Service operational headquarters was to be set up, the most likely choice being the Navy centre at Northwood, Middlesex. Then, in July, a new Strike Command office block, which had been constructed adjacent to the underground operations bunker, and which had only recently been completed, was usurped by NATO as a Principal Subordinate Command HQ for the air defence of north-west Europe (AIRNW).

In 1976, Doolittle, left, returned to Britain with his predecessor, Lieutenant General Ira M. Eaker, right, to perform a unique ceremony. On August 8, the Americans unveiled a plaque in the foyer of the new Strike Command HQ to record the wartime association between the two air forces during the war. Sir Arthur Harris, centre, performed a similar function at the American headquarters, located on the other side of High Wycombe (see page 42).

Left: **Earlier in the day at Wycombe Abbey girls' school, General Doolittle was pictured outside his old headquarters with the headmistress, Miss Patricia Lancaster.** *Right:* **From 1976 . . . back to 1945. Then the General had had his photo taken standing virtually on the same spot with yet another lady during the Royal visit on May 11.**

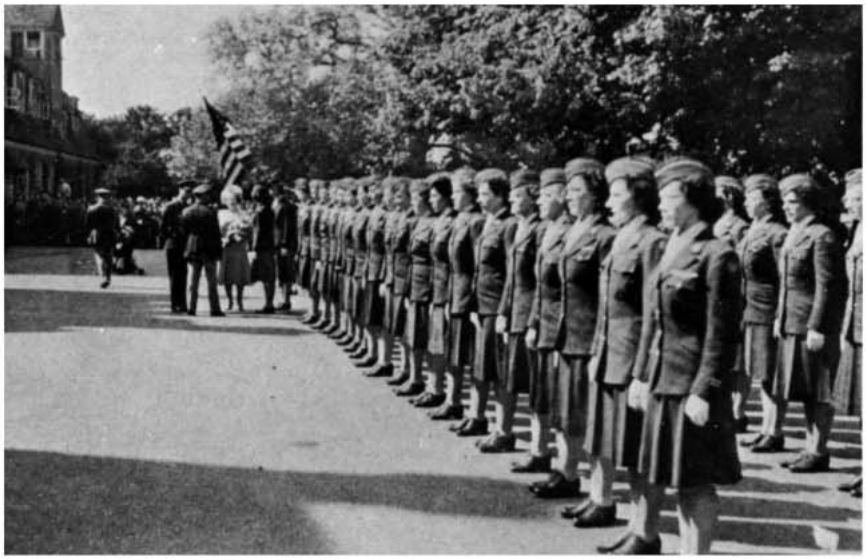
WYCOMBE ABBEY

On September 23, 1896 — Victoria Day, marking the day upon which Queen Victoria had reigned longer than any other British monarch — a school for girls opened on the Noakes Manor estate in the southern quarter of High Wycombe. The pseudo-mediaeval house had been reconstructed in the late 18th century in the then-popular, neo-Gothic style by the first Lord Carrington, the newly-turreted and battlemented building being renamed Wycombe Abbey. The house and 30 acres had been sold to a 'syndicate' which wanted to establish a girls' school there while Lord Carrington retained Daws Hill House, further up the hill of the same name to the south, surrounded by nearly 400 acres of parkland.

In 1928, 200 acres of Daws Hill, including its house and lodges, was put up for sale as building land. As the school had no wish to see themselves surrounded by streets and houses, the decision was taken to purchase the property for the then princely sum of £75,000 which provided accommodation for extra pupils, more playing fields, with room left over for expansion.

The coming of war in 1939 had little direct effect on the school other than that some girls were withdrawn, and, at one point, the idea of evacuating the whole school overseas was discussed. Nevertheless, with reduced income, it continued under its resourceful headmistress, Miss W. M. Crosthwaite, who had been responsible for the Daws Hill purchase in the first few months after her appointment. However, in March 1942, it became known that the school premises and grounds had been inspected by the air force with a view to them being requisitioned for the expansion of the Bomber Command presence in the town. Although Miss Crosthwaite protested vigorously, and appealed to the Board of Education to intervene, all her efforts were in vain, and, on March 28, the Air Ministry took over the entire property. Having been expropriated in just 16 days, there was no alternative but to disperse the girls to other schools and close down for the duration. Meanwhile, the Governors had to find a way to meet the considerable overdraft charges as it was not until December 1943 that an equitable rent (£6,500) was agreed with the Air Ministry.

The USAAF relinquished the school in October 1945 and the buildings were handed back by the Air Ministry the following February so that the school could reopen for the September term.



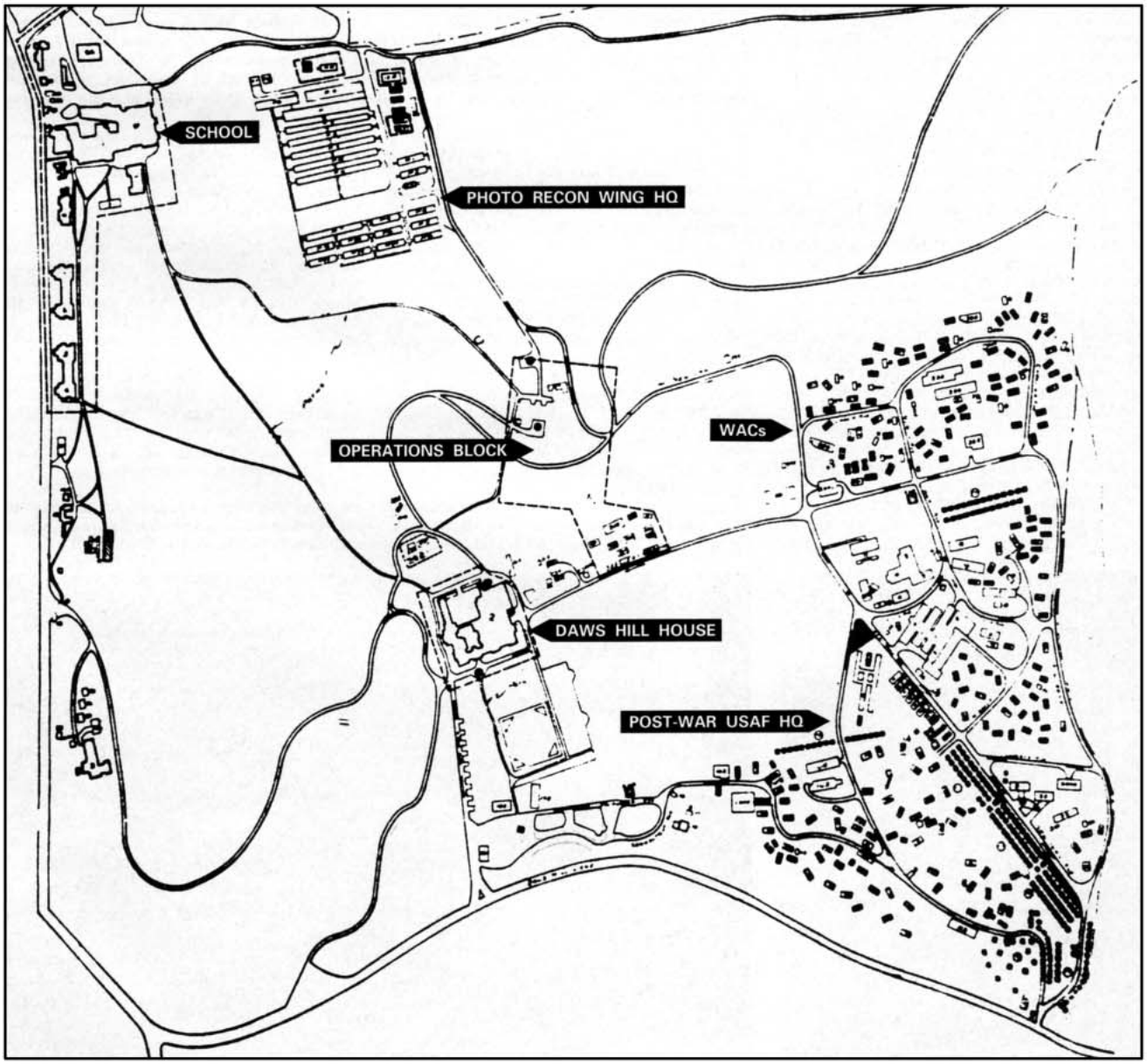
HM King George VI inspects the Guard of Honor provided by the Women's Army Corps, the WACs serving at the Eighth headquarters having been the first substantial representation of the corps to arrive in the British Isles during the war.

'PINETREE'

With the impending arrival of heavy bomber units of the US Army in the United Kingdom in the middle of 1942, a suitable headquarters was urgently required and it was prudent to site this close to the existing RAF Bomber Command HQ. This prompted the hasty acquisition of Wycombe Abbey and the school grounds, the first American officers arriving there on April 15 to set up an Eighth Air Force headquarters, Station 101, for VIII Bomber Command.

The school itself was used for administrative offices under the Eighth's commander, Brigadier General (later Lieutenant General) Ira M. Eaker; Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle (from January 1944), and Major General William A. Kepner (from May 1945).

The Americans had taken over Wycombe Abbey, conveniently located just five miles from Bomber Command's headquarters, in May 1942, although the Eighth Army Air Force still had much to do to build up its strength in the UK. Also, the precise rôle that the Americans were to adopt alongside the RAF had yet to be agreed on. The Eighth had begun with small-scale daylight raids, but Harris wanted the Americans to join with him in the bombing of Germany by night. In January 1943, the question was on the agenda of the Casablanca Conference. Churchill was supporting Harris's case with President Roosevelt, so the new commander of the Eighth, Lieutenant General Eaker, was flown to North Africa by General Henry Arnold, the overall commander of the US Army Air Forces, to help press the American viewpoint. Eaker's argument was that if the US continued to bomb by day and the RAF by night, it would prevent the Germans from getting any respite. Churchill immediately warmed to the idea of a round-the-clock offensive, even though he had strong misgivings over the higher casualties the Americans were suffering — sometimes up to ten per cent on a raid, compared with around two per cent claimed for Bomber Command. 'I have always felt', Eaker said later, 'that it was the PM who saved our daylight bombing effort at that critical juncture.' *Below:* **The American headquarters was officially Station 101, but was named Camp Lynn in memory of Lieutenant William Lynn, the first Eighth Air Force crewman to go missing in action over Europe. He was a member of the 15th Bomb Squadron and went down while flying an RAF Boston on July 4, 1942. The HQ, also code-named 'Pinetree', sprawled throughout the 200-odd acres owned by the school in the south-eastern quarter of High Wycombe.**



Three months later, Churchill paid a visit with Sir Arthur (right) to see Eaker (centre at rear) at Wycombe Abbey. With them on the stairs to his office are John Peck of Churchill's private office; Mary Churchill and Flag Lieutenant C. R. 'Tommy' Thompson, Churchill's aide-de-camp. In the centre is General Frank M. Andrews, commanding general of the European Theater of Operations, soon to be killed in a plane crash.

Clusters of buildings were erected in the grounds and the western slope of Daws Hill became a tent city to cope with the accommodation of HQ personnel which by the war's end numbered 12,000.

On the crest of the hill, an underground bunker had been built at a cost of nearly £200,000 in little more than 11 months. This was initially occupied by RAF Bomber Command who then shared it with VIII Bomber Command until the Americans finally took it over.

The 'Pinetree' command centre comprised three floors extending over 23,000 sq. ft, all underground, with a covering of 10ft of concrete and 25ft of soil. The side walls were over 6ft thick and were surrounded by a void varying from 2ft 6in. to 4ft to create a 'building within a building' to absorb the shock of an explosion. Internal walls were 5ft thick. The whole was protected by gas-tight doors and air filtration and air conditioning to maintain an internal temperature of 67°F. Emergency power and water supplies allowed the underground complex to be self-supporting for a considerable period.

By January 1945, with the end of the war in sight, the Governors were pressing the authorities for an assurance that the school would be de-requisitioned within three months of the cessation of hostilities. The headmistress had already received applications for the September term but, receiving an unsatisfactory reply from the Ministry of Education, an approach was made direct to the Air Ministry, which brought the ominous news that the 'the Air Ministry might be considering the permanent acquisition of the premises'.

The Chairman of the Governors, in reply, asked for an assurance that 'the buildings would be returned as soon as they were no longer required for the purposes for which they had been requisitioned', and, in May, the Member of Parliament for High Wycombe, Sir Alfred Knox, raised the matter in the House of Commons. Although Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, gave the assurance that 'the school buildings will be released as soon as the Allied unit now occupying them has been moved', it was obvious that the reopening of the school would be delayed until 1946.

In October 1945, it was reported that the Americans, except for some at the Daws Hill Camp at the top of the hill, would be leaving on the 25th, but that the RAF would then be taking over, the Air Ministry saying that the buildings would be handed back as soon as representatives of the school and the Air Ministry were agreed on dilapidations.

By February 1946, there was general agreement between the parties, save that the handover would not include the so-called 'Protected Area' which included what was euphemistically described as the 'Underground Telephone Exchange'.

The office of the Commanding General lies beyond the archway. *Left:* **An inscription over the door singles out this classroom** *(right)* **as something special: 'Major General Ira C. Eaker 1942-1944' and 'Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle 1944-1945'.**

With the 7th Photo Group squadrons operating just a few miles away at Mount Farm, a headquarters was also established at Wycombe Abbey for the 325th Reconnaissance Wing. Its accommodation was built on the school's sports field from which a winding road led up to the WAC camp and the other buildings surrounding the underground operations centre whose entrance lay on the top of Daws Hill.

With the ending of the US presence at the school, Miss Crosthwaite included an article in the first post-war issue of the Wycombe Abbey *Gazette* written by one of the American officers before he left with the title of 'The Exodus':

THE EXODUS

'The MPs with white belt and leggings salute smartly as you turn into the gate in the red-brick wall. Rounding the bend in the driveway, you see before you a stately grey stone building before which stretch spacious lawns and a lake ringed with flowers. Some large cars stand by the doorway. The afternoon is quiet save for a sense of suppressed activity. Suddenly, a voice blares over the loud-speaker in the courtyard. The front door opens and a party of officers jump into one of the waiting cars which speeds up the hill. It stops by a small squat concrete house and the party disappears. A Jeep careers down the hill. Beyond the wall you can hear the scream of heavy army trucks as they round the curve. Some heavy bombers throb overhead on their way to Germany.

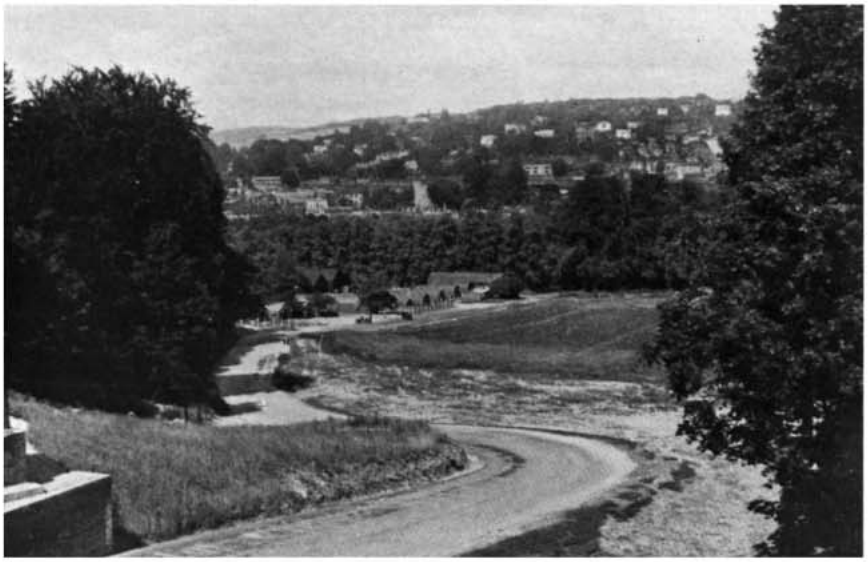
'This is Wycombe Abbey School — for more than three years the headquarters of the US Eighth Air Force. For these three years, it has been the nerve center of the mighty daylight air assaults which, in co-operation with the night operations of the RAF, paved the way for Allied victory in Europe. Within the school buildings and grounds were conceived, planned and directed the operations of the world's mightiest strategic air force — 200,000 men and women, 2,400 heavy four-engine bombers, 1,200 fighter planes.

'A little more than three years ago, the staff of Wycombe Abbey School was called upon to execute a mass evacuation in an amount of time that would make the ablest military commander ponder the possibility of passing such a crisis. Not that the retreat was to be costly in lives — rather was it a problem of logistics for the movement of people and belongings and equipment. And the impossible was done — a thing which was to characterise the activities connected with the Abbey from the beginning.

'Only a few of the original staff remained on the premises. The Americans rolled in in their trucks which churned up the peaceful roads from the Abbey to Daws Hill. Nissen huts and machine guns replaced the quiet of heretofore untouched fields and hills. Giant holes were dug in innocent hillsides and clambering Jeeps played leap-frog over open spaces.

'Long lines of soldiers could be seen wending their way up and down the hill from the Abbey to the camp area at Camp Lynn beyond Daws Hill. On top of the field, a baseball field was built near the parade grounds and, back of the field, grew up a small-scale city of Nissen huts and tents, movie theater, Red Cross Club, mess halls and kitchens, guard posts and motor pools. Bulldozers furrowed the grounds. Roads were laid down where there had been no roads before. By the Abbey itself, the perfectly kept lawn on which the girls had played cricket began to show the scars of vigorous baseball games. In the building, halls that once echoed to the light fantastic toe, now resounded to the clicking of heels and heavy boots. Rooms that once listened to recitations in Latin and Greek, now shrank from booming accents from across the sea howling frantically about matters of keeping airplanes in the air.

'The school hall of the Abbey was split into a dozen separate offices, each with desks and 'phones. The ground floor rooms became hives of activity. The Air Force Engineer moved into Campbell House. The Public Relations officer moved into Airlie House. The Air Force Surgeon moved into



The view from the hillside back down the wartime road to Wing HQ.

After the war, the huts were demolished and the wartime road realigned closer to the tree-line.

Left: **The brand new command bunker that the RAF had constructed beneath Daws Hill became the 'Pinetree' nerve centre of the US VIII Bomber Command under Brigadier General Newton Longfellow, command passing on July 1, 1943 to Brigadier General Frank L. Anderson, seen here** *(right)* **escorting the US Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, on an inspection tour of the ops block later that month. (It is debatable as to whether the code-name 'Pinetree' was specific to the operations centre itself or if it applied to the whole of the High Wycombe complex.)**

Barry House. The Domestic Science Building became the Chalet Officers' Club. Daws Hill became the home for the Combined Operations Planning Committee with staff officers of the Eighth and the RAF. The Intelligence Section set up house there and in the underground. The underground operations rooms housed the huge maps, the communications center, the operational planning sections, and the thousand and one branches of Air Corps activity which enabled the mighty strength of the Eighth to rise from its hundreds of fields in East Anglia and launch itself against the Reich.

'Perhaps at this point it is worth recording the achievements of one year of operations conducted from the Abbey. In 1944, the Eighth reached its peak of offensive power. On December 24, it dispatched in one day 2,034 heavy bombers and 936 fighters. Over 21,000 Americans flew in that armada over marshalling yards, communication centers and airfields behind the enemy lines. Many times that number worked on the ground to launch these planes and to direct their assault. During 1944 alone, the Eighth hit the enemy with 43,000 tons of bombs. Its flyers flew 1,700,000 operational hours. Its planes consumed 522,000,000 gallons of petrol. More than 3,000,000 bombs and incendiaries were loaded on the planes and 53,000,000 rounds of ammunition were hand-linked and loaded. At the Abbey headquarters, the telephone exchanges handled as many as 14,000 telephone calls in a single day. Without the smooth operating brain of operations housed in the Abbey, these achievements would have been impossible.

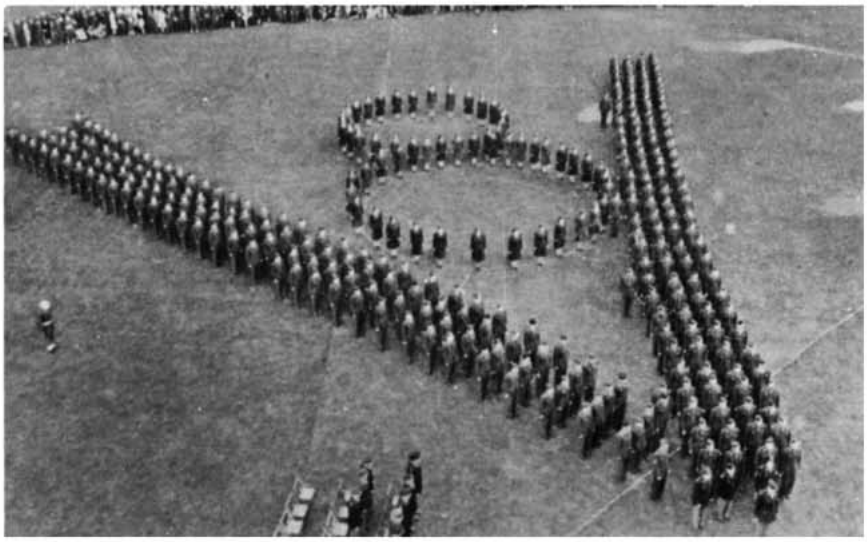
'Today, the tension has snapped. Operations are over. The strategic air assault on Germany is done. Above the fireplace in the hallway of the Abbey hangs a map of the Pacific towards which two-thirds of the Eighth have already left. The great hall still hums with the noise of the 'phones, voices and typewriters rising from the partitioned offices. The camouflaged netting is down from the courtyard. Some of the trenches and shelters are gone from the grounds. Jeeps and cars still whizz along the drive. The great gash on the hillside where the road leads to the underground operations room, past the squat black hutments of the Photo Reconnaissance Wing, still belies the peaceful atmosphere of the Abbey. Along the stately hallways you can see the photographs of the flak-filled skies, crippled planes, and devastated target areas which bear mute witness of the destructive power of the Eighth. And among the files in the quieted office lie the records of those who gave their all to bring victory.

Although the school buildings were handed back in 1946, the Air Ministry retained the Daws Hill site with its underground facility, erecting a security fence between it and the school grounds. RAF Daws Hill was handed over to the US Strategic Air Command in 1952 and, although deactivated in May 1993, requests to photograph the interior of the ops block have been refused. Veterans visiting the bunker in July 1994 were required to deposit their cameras with the police before being allowed inside. This picture of the exterior (the wartime entrance is 30 yards away and no longer in use) was taken by Robert Mead during a USAF open day in 1976.

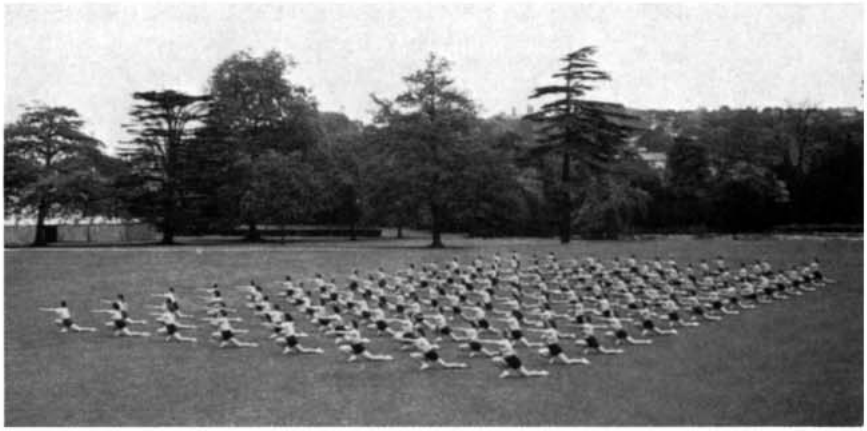
EXODUS PLUS

'Now, the tables are turned and it will be our turn to make the exodus. Papers will be destroyed, files will be packed, equipment will be moved. But though we and our equipment may move, a great part of us will stay with the Abbey and all the adventures with which it is associated in our minds. Throughout these years, the Head Mistress, Miss Crosthwaite, true friend alike of the school and the Eighth, has stayed in her office with Miss Allison. Through all these operations, she has maintained the link with the school always ready to smooth away any problem of occupancy. With her have stayed many we also count as old friends — those who work on the estate, those who work so efficiently in the Abbey and in the dining halls — Miss Duncan, tireless and cheerful — and all those others known by name or sight who made Wycombe Abbey home.

'Among the proudest days we remember was when the King and Queen paid their visit. They were taken by Lieutenant-General James H. Doolittle and his staff on a tour of the operations rooms and the various offices. Later, the King invested the Commanding General with the KCB.'



Above: **Victory in Europe — Eighth Air Force style — and** *below* **the seniors of Wycombe Abbey perform at their Jubilee in 1948.**



On May 11, 1945, General Doolittle greeted the Royal visitors at the entrance to the Abbey, inviting the King and Queen to inspect the honor guard before touring the headquarters. It was said that their Majesties were particularly interested in the large number of WACs they saw employed at the headquarters carrying out a wide variety of jobs enabling more men to be available for active service. *Below:* **Colonel Johnson, the base commander, leads the way along the rear of the school towards the main hall. Behind the King is Major General William E. Kepner, commanding VIII Fighter Command; General Anderson and Major Mary Dixon, the WACs' detachment commanding officer. An hour later, the party were driven up past Wing Headquarters to the underground complex.**

We are very fortunate that Robert Mead was allowed to take pictures inside the operations block by the then base commander, Major Jerry McKenna *(left)*. **At that time (April 1976), the underground facility had been gathering dust for six years, the only equipment remaining being the cases from old electronic equipment** *(right)*.

HIGH WYCOMBE AIR STATION

When the school governing body met in June 1946, the first item on the agenda was a letter from the Air Ministry concerning 'the underground accommodation'. At that time, the Daws Hill camp with its operations bunker on the top of the hill was an integral part of the school grounds and the Governors agreed that while they were prepared to grant a lease on the property, they would not agree to the outright sale of any part. Meanwhile, the surface buildings of the camp had been taken over by homeless civilians, evacuated from the blitzed areas of London, who eyed the recently-abandoned American quarters very favourably, and families were soon converting the huts into living accommodation.

Understandably, Miss Crosthwaite was very concerned at this invasion and said she would not reopen for the September term unless a fence was erected between the camp and the school grounds. The Town Clerk was informed that the Governors were taking every possible step to have the camp vacated, although it was anticipated that this might put the school on a collision course with the local authority who were duty bound to provide housing for the homeless. As expected, the Town Clerk responded with a request to the Governors asking if they would grant the council a lease of the land presently occupied by the squatters. The problem rumbled on and was not finally resolved until the local housing situation improved and

In August that year came the 'Day of the Generals', when 'Bomber' Harris reciprocated the event held at Strike Command by unveiling a similar plaque in the Station HQ at Daws Hill. The ceremonies were sealed by a fly-past of the RAF's preserved Lancaster from Conningsby and the Fortress from Duxford.

council houses were available in the Sands, Terriers and Tolkridge areas of the town.

Meanwhile, the Air Ministry was still arguing over the level of compensation payable to the school, refusing outright to pay for the removal of the wartime concrete roads, the matter not being resolved until May 1949.

In December 1950, the Air Ministry offered £125 per annum for a 21-year lease on the underground area, whereupon they would erect a 'sight-proof' fence between the school and the camp. The proposal had been prompted by the desire of the US Strategic Air Command (SAC) to reoccupy the wartime command centre for its UK-based 7th Air Division. In May 1952, SAC established the 3929th Air Base Squadron there and, on September 10, High Wycombe Air Station was officially reactivated as 'USAF Site, Wycombe Abbey', as a satellite of the 3911th Air Base Group at RAF West Drayton.

In 1953, the Air Ministry required additional land to expand the camp on Daws Hill, and a new lease was agreed with the school in February 1954 for 28 years at £1,600 per annum. This was in anticipation of the move of the 7th Air Division headquarters from its Middlesex base at South Ruislip to High Wycombe. The move made sense as it would position the HQ midway between the SAC bases in East Anglia and those in the Oxford area, and also be close to the RAF Bomber Command HQ.

Then, on July 23, 1994, the Eighth Air Force Pinetree Memorial, erected by the Ridgeway Military and Aviation Research Group, was unveiled by veterans outside Daws Hill House — seen *above* during its tenure by the Eighth. *Below:* Today, the building stands within the school boundary and is used for dormitory accommodation.

Then, in June that year, a further proposal was received from the Air Ministry, this time to purchase the site outright. Negotiations opened between the school and the USAF in July but dragged on for over two years before a sale price was finally agreed and contracts exchanged in August 1956. The Air Ministry was to pay £40,000 for the main part of what was generally referred to as the Daws Hill site; to accept a lease for the area of the underground installation for a 28-year period at a nominal £1 per annum (and for an extended period of 28 years at £100 per annum) and give a written assurance that there would be no tunnelling or boring beyond the area of the leased land.

By 1959, after the 7th Air Division quit four of its East Anglian bases, SAC operations in the UK were concentrated in Oxfordshire, and High Wycombe was the obvious choice for a central headquarters and, on July 1, 1959, the 3929th Air Base Squadron assumed direct support of the base, the move from South Ruislip being completed by October that year. Over 70 new buildings were constructed and numerous other modifications made, including the addition of extra dormitories in 1960 and 1961.

For the next five years, the station served as the Strategic Air Command's UK nerve-centre during a period of the Cold War when SAC and Bomber Command were practically one air force in concept and operation. However, by 1965, the B-47 force had been superseded by jet bombers with the capability of air-to-air refuelling and the US decided that it could provide a higher level of defence direct from bases in the United States. In June that year, the 7th Air Division at High Wycombe was deactivated as the last step in its withdrawal from the United Kingdom, and the base was transferred to the US Third Air Force and the United States Air Forces in Europe. The 7563rd Air Base Squadron then took up residence and provided support for the Department of Defense activities in the London area until the base closed in January 1971. By then, the underground operations centre was no longer in use.

In April 1984, the host organisation was redesignated the 7520th Air Base Squadron, coming under the direct control of the Third Air Force HQ at RAF Mildenhall in July 1987, before being finally deactivated in May 1993, tenure being handed over to the Commander of US Navy Activities UK.

Friday, February 25, 1944 — Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, has his photograph taken on the roof of Norfolk House (see *After the Battle* No. 84) by Captain D. W. Smith, the official war artist, who was commissioned to paint a portrait from them for an illustration in Kenneth Edwards' second volume of *Men of Action*. (IWM)

THE DEATH OF ADMIRAL RAMSAY

By W. J. R. Gardner

On New Year's Day 1945, the Allies could reflect that the Second World War was within recognisable sight of ending in their favour. Certainly, the Germans had just made their last large effort in the Ardennes, but this had by now been contained and was about to be pushed back. In large-scale coalition conflict of this nature it is often difficult to identify truly important personalities — especially those who stand the test of time. Eisenhower obviously holds this position, but another one who deserves much more attention than has come his way is Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, Royal Navy, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief for the liberation of Europe.

It was apt that the man who had so successfully rescued the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk in 1940 should have overseen the return to France in 1944. His other achievements in North-West Africa, Sicily and the Scheldt estuary were also considerable. On the morning of January 2, 1945, he was due to fly from his headquarters near Paris to Brussels for a meeting with Field-Marshal Montgomery, the commander of 21st Army Group. Just before 11.30 a.m., he embarked in his personal aircraft, a Hudson. The aircraft took off, climbed slowly, banked, then crashed into the ground within a mile of the end of the runway. Ramsay and all those on board were killed.

Less than a year later, Admiral Ramsay arrives at Toussus-le-Noble to board his aircraft for his final, fatal flight: destination Brussels. The date is Tuesday, January 2, 1945. (IWM)

Recalled from retirement with the rank of Vice-Admiral (Retired) on January 12, 1939, in less than a year he was called upon to mastermind one of the greatest evacuations ever known. Operation 'Dynamo' was controlled from his headquarters situated in the tunnels within the White Cliffs of Dover.

RAMSAY'S WAR

Ramsay would, almost certainly, not have achieved the prominence he did had he not had the opportunity to demonstrate his qualities during the Second World War. In this, luck seemed to have played an important and balancing rôle. Bad luck played a part as he only had one brief job as a flag officer before retiring in the 1930s: good luck in as much as he was appointed as a retired officer to the dormant post of Flag Officer, Dover, which he took up on the outbreak of war.

Little more than a year later, Ramsay had to improvise the evacuation of Dunkirk, Operation 'Dynamo' (see *After the Battle* No. 3), using a motley collection of warships, peacetime pleasure steamers and small boats to lift the British Expeditionary Force from the European continent at the end of the disastrous campaign in Belgium and France. Starting with a largely disorganised and partly demoralised ground force, inadequate port facilities and virtually constant attack on harbours and beaches from the air, this was no small task. Although much of the achievement belongs to the ships, craft and men at Dunkirk, Ramsay's organisation was responsible for maximising the available forces to allow for rapidly changing circumstances. This attainment alone belies the charge sometimes later made at Ramsay that he organised in too great detail. Dunkirk was a model of clear, logical thinking being used to evacuate nearly 340,000 men under fire in little more than a week.

Some 20 months later, whilst Ramsay was still in charge at Dover, the German battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* carried out the 'Channel Dash' on passage to Germany. They were not stopped by the British, but this tactical success led to strategic oblivion as they were no longer in a position to pose an immediate threat to the Atlantic. The British failure did not reflect badly on Ramsay.

Shortly after this episode, he was appointed to command the expeditionary force, planning the invasion of North-West Africa. These operations, codenamed 'Gymnast' then 'Torch', were to be conducted simultaneously against both Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of North Africa and were to involve 70,000 troops, 350 transport and landing ships, and 200 warships. Some of these came directly from America, adding to complication, planning time and the need for oceanic protection. Although it was hoped that the landings would be unopposed, some resistance had to be allowed for. In the event, this happened in some places, notably Oran. When the operation took place, Ramsay served as deputy to Admiral Cunningham, a relatively late change in the chain of command, brought about probably by the latter's familiarity with the Americans and, possibly, some British sensitivities about Ramsay still being on the retired list. The operations were successful, leading ultimately to the ejection of Axis forces from North Africa.

This was to lead on to the first return to Europe — Italy through Sicily — in mid-1943. Endorsed by the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff as late as April 1943, much had to be done before the planned landings in July. The challenges were greater than before. The land forces were much larger, with some 180,000 troops from the British Empire and America; resistance was certain and requirements changed frequently. Specialised landing craft and ships were used for the first time, too. Ramsay coped with all this admirably and Operation 'Husky' (see *After the Battle* No. 77) was another success, despite initially marginal weather. In this case Ramsay, as well as planning the entire operation, was given full command of the (British) Eastern Task Force. Within a month of the landings, Axis forces were carrying out their own version of Dunkirk across the Straits of Messina.

By the autumn, however, Ramsay was back in England starting to organise the greatest amphibious operation of all, 'Neptune' — the landings in Normandy. Here again, all that had gone before paled into insignificance. Its scale and challenges were immense. The invasion of Sicily had anticipated resistance which, on the whole, had not materialised. German troops in France were unlikely to be as easy a proposition. Their sheer numbers and relative ease of mobility made strategic deception absolutely essential. As well as the initial lodgement of the first few days, there would also need to be rapid build-up, as no deception — no matter how successful in the beginning — could last indefinitely. German beach defences were known to be formidable and the failure of the large-scale raid on Dieppe earlier in the war continued to haunt minds, especially British and Canadian.

One conundrum was choosing the site of the invasion to occur where some surprise might be achieved, but also having access to a major port to supply the build-up and the hoped-for subsequent advance into Europe. The Germans reasoned that for the Allies after the Dieppe débâcle, they needed such a port at an early, if not the initial, stage. The Allied solution adopted was to choose Normandy at a relatively weak part of the German defences and to conduct subsequent reinforcement by means of artificial harbours until a major port was in Allied use. The design and deployment of this novel development was just one of the problems that fell Ramsay's way. There were other technical difficulties with protecting the force in transit, combating the German defences both at sea and on shore, and in landing numbers of troops and their equipment with the minimum risk. All these forces — land, sea and air — from a number of different nations had to be trained in their basic tasks and rehearsed in the higher level mechanics of the operation. All of this was Ramsay's responsibility as Naval C-in-C.

Having been appointed the Naval Commander-in-Chief Expeditionary Force with the acting rank of Admiral for the invasion of North Africa, probably his Retired status led to him being switched to Deputy for the actual operation. In this picture, he is seen with the British Task Force Commanders for the subsequent invasion of Sicily: Air Vice-Marshal Harry Broadhurst and General Sir Bernard Montgomery.

Moment of triumph as Admiral Ramsay escorts General Eisenhower in a cruise off the Normandy coast on board HMS *Apollo* on June 7, 1944. (IWM)

But the greatest problem of all was the sheer organisation of the entire armada. Ships of varying characteristics and speed had to be formed up so as to arrive off a particular beach at a precise time. They had to be protected against aircraft, surface ships, mines and submarines throughout their passage. Their arrival was often preceded by naval gun-fire support; their journey had to be free of concern from mines; follow-on stores had to arrive promptly; craft with limited navigational capacity had to have help with this vital skill; and considerable and complex marshalling of the forces off the assault beaches was necessary. All these activities had to work in conjunction with air operations and precursory ones on land; forces of all participating nations had to understand unambiguously what their tasks were. Clearly, Ramsay could not attend to all these details himself, but his skill in selecting subordinates, and enthusing them with his method of working, ensured that this most complex of operations could take place at all and, more importantly, would succeed.

After Normandy, it would be easy to assume that the naval war had been won and thus Ramsay's tasks were at an end. But the many problems of supplying the advance into Europe occupied much of his time and efforts. Nor were these problems merely logistical conundrums. After the liberation of Antwerp in early September, Ramsay had to champion a case for the rapid clearance of the Scheldt banks against the enthusiasm of Field-Marshal Montgomery for moving straight towards Germany. Eventually successful, he then had to superintend the operation for the taking of Walcheren, the island at the mouth of the western Scheldt at the beginning of November 1944, known as Operation 'Infatuate' (see *After the Battle* No. 36) and the subsequent clearance of the Scheldt, Operation 'Calendar'. This was a desperate venture, conducted under difficult conditions against a still determined well-entrenched enemy, but it succeeded. It was to be Ramsay's last significant operation.

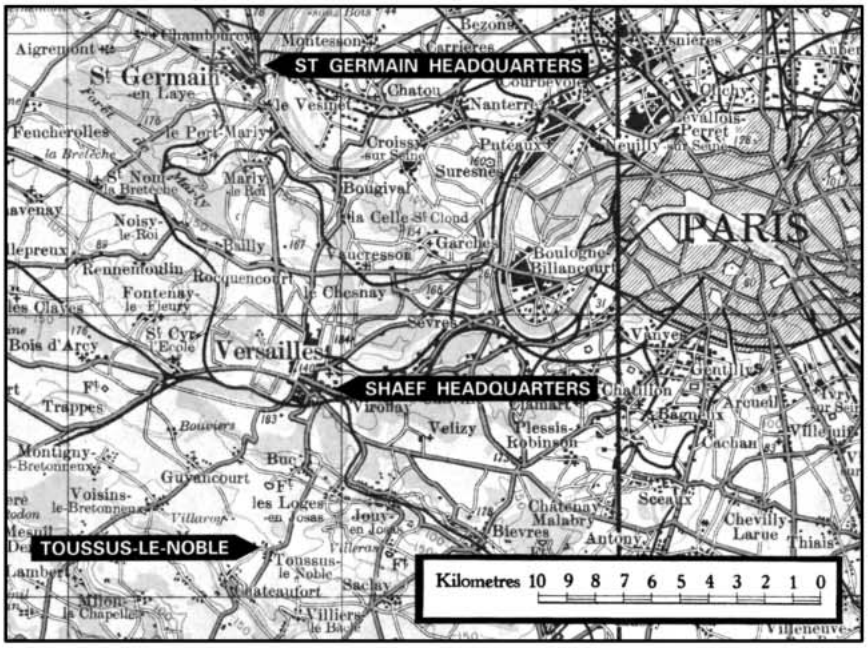
Although by now already embroiled in the post-war planning process for Europe, Ramsay felt, at the age of 61, that he wished to stand down once the war was won, so that he might enjoy his retirement with his family. Few rewards have been more deserved but, in the event, he was not fated to receive his due.

RAMSAY AND FLYING

As Ramsay met his death in the air, it may be helpful to say something about the use he made of this form of transport in the last year of his life. Since being appointed Allied Naval Commander Expeditionary Force (ANCXF) in the autumn of 1943, he had had an increasing need for high mobility. Initially, this had been caused by the necessity to keep in touch with the many widespread bases and training areas involved in Operation 'Neptune'. Later, another factor intruded making rapid transport essential: the move into Europe itself, shifting high commanders from such compact and easy locations as London and Portsmouth to greater dispersion on and off the continent of Europe. For example, Montgomery's tactical headquarters would be in one location; that of the (largely) British 21st Army Group HQ in another, whilst Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, was in a third, while SHAEF HQ was at another (see *After the Battle* No. 84). Ramsay remained at Southwick near Portsmouth until early September when he moved to Granville in France for a short period, and then to St Germain on the western outskirts of Paris.

However, in that era, the vagaries of signal communication, both in its provision and reliability, made personal contact between these commanders as important as it always has been. Added to this, the sometimes difficult combination of personalities could often only be made to pull in the right direction through personal contact. As a negative example of this, Ramsay's problems in impressing the urgency of clearing the

Four days later, it was possible for the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief to personally go ashore. Admiral Ramsay had been replaced on the Active List on April 26, just over a month before 'Overlord'. (IWM)



When SHAEF HQ moved to Versailles, on the south-western outskirts of Paris, Ramsay's ANXCF's headquarters were located in the Château Hennemont at St Germain, 12 miles west of Paris, with his personal quarters a few minutes walk away in the Château Léger.

Scheldt banks in the autumn on Eisenhower, and the latter's difficulties with Montgomery on the same subject, were no doubt made worse by geographical separation and poor communications. These problems could largely be offset by air transport, but flying was neither as reliable or safe as it was to become in the post-war years.

Many of Ramsay's flights in the latter half of 1944 can be traced by means of his diary. As well as logging these, something of his attitudes to flying also emerge. To later generations who take this mode of transport for granted, it should be remembered that manned flight was barely 40 years old in 1945, and that the Royal Navy had been deprived of its aviation arm in 1918 on the formation of the Royal Air Force. Control was not to be regained until the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War. An important consequence of this was that two or more generations of naval officers were not particularly aware of the air and its possibilities, both for warfare and transport: Ramsay falls into this classification.

Nevertheless, Ramsay quickly developed a full understanding of airpower and its ramifications. On a daily basis, he made use of aircraft for transport around both his widespread and varied area of responsibility and for keeping in touch with other commanders. In July, he made three visits by air to France, generally in the Cherbourg area, and often noting pilot, aircraft type and significant events. On landing back at Thorney Island in West Sussex on July 14, he observed without further comment that the aircraft had burst a tyre on landing. Ramsay was becoming a relaxed and habituated air traveller. But on July 20 what was to become a common theme emerged, that of the cancelled flight, because of poor weather. Ramsay recorded in his diary, 'A wasted morning. Very annoying to miss this opportunity too.'

Later in 1944, Ramsay was to make much use of various aircraft, particularly those of X Flight of No. 781 Naval Air Squadron based at Toussus-le-Noble (near St Germain) since September for SHAEF comms and liaison duties, including the Domini and the Beechcraft, piloted by Lieutenant Albert Bret, French Navy and Sub-Lieutenant (A) John Sharp, RNVR. As well as the earlier burst tyre, he had experience of poor weather and other incidents. On November 28, he was attempting to land at Brussels when, '[a] strong northeasterly crosswind threw us about and on landing we were tilted over, necessitating immediate decision to take off again. Brett (sic) did this well, only slight damage along flap resulting. We then circled aerodrome until permission received to land in the wind across the runway. Made good landing but this delayed us 15 minutes.'

But increasingly, Ramsay was to make use of his Hudson, a three-year-old aircraft which had flown operationally with Coastal Command before conversion to a transport. Often, too, this was to be in the charge of Lieutenant-Commander Sir George Lewis. Ramsay was obviously satisfied with him as an aviator because he requested that Lewis be allocated as his personal pilot. On a more personal level, Lewis clearly got on well with the Admiral. This was probably not surprising. Ramsay would have found more in common with Lewis on a social basis than he did with the other pilots. Lewis's background and experience as a lawyer was more likely to interest Ramsay than that of the rest of his regular pilots. On the day before he died, Lewis was to be gazetted with an OBE for 'non-operational flying services'. More personally, he gave the Admiral one of his few recorded Christmas presents in 1944 and shared lunch with him that day.

The Hudson was used for other purposes, too. On August 2, Lewis took the Admiral to Scotland under conditions of poor visibility. After some problems with low cloud, they managed to land at Charterhall close to the Admiral's home. Ramsay's family were shown round the aircraft, before it returned south. On this occasion, Ramsay had his leave cut short and had to return to his headquarters at Southwick in the less roomy interior of a Beaufighter. Later in the month, he again flew to Scotland in the Hudson. This was to be Admiral Ramsay's last visit home.

His diary gives good indications of both his growing reliance on air transport during the year and the effect of weather on such means of mobility in north-west Europe in the autumn and winter of 1944-45. Often, poor weather of one sort or another, at one end or the other of a planned flight would preclude making the journey by air, or indeed at all. This often frustrated Ramsay who certainly developed an acute awareness of its strengths and constraints.

Admiral Ramsay had the use of a Fleet Air Arm Hudson V of X Flight of No. 781 Squadron based at airfield A-46 ('A' standing for American) five miles south of Versailles at Toussus-le-Noble. This is the actual aircraft used on January 2, serial AM550. The Hudson was a low-wing, twin-engined, tail-wheel monoplane whose origins lay in the Lockheed 14 Super Electra airliner. The aircraft was first ordered by the RAF in June 1938. Originally intended as a navigation trainer, it was quickly diverted for use as a maritime patrol aircraft and proved extremely useful, being available long before the higher performance aircraft such as Sunderlands and Liberators were deployed in sufficient numbers. At the outbreak of war in 1939, two squadrons, No. 224 (in which AM550 later flew) and No. 233 were operating from Leuchars and Bircham Newton, respectively, and one 224 Squadron aircraft claims to be the first operating from the United Kingdom to shoot down a German aircraft when, during a patrol over the North Sea on October 8, 1939, a Dornier Do 18 flying boat was destroyed. However, by 1945, the type was being replaced by more modern and powerful aircraft and, as a result, many Hudsons were converted to other rôles, such as training and transport. (IWM)

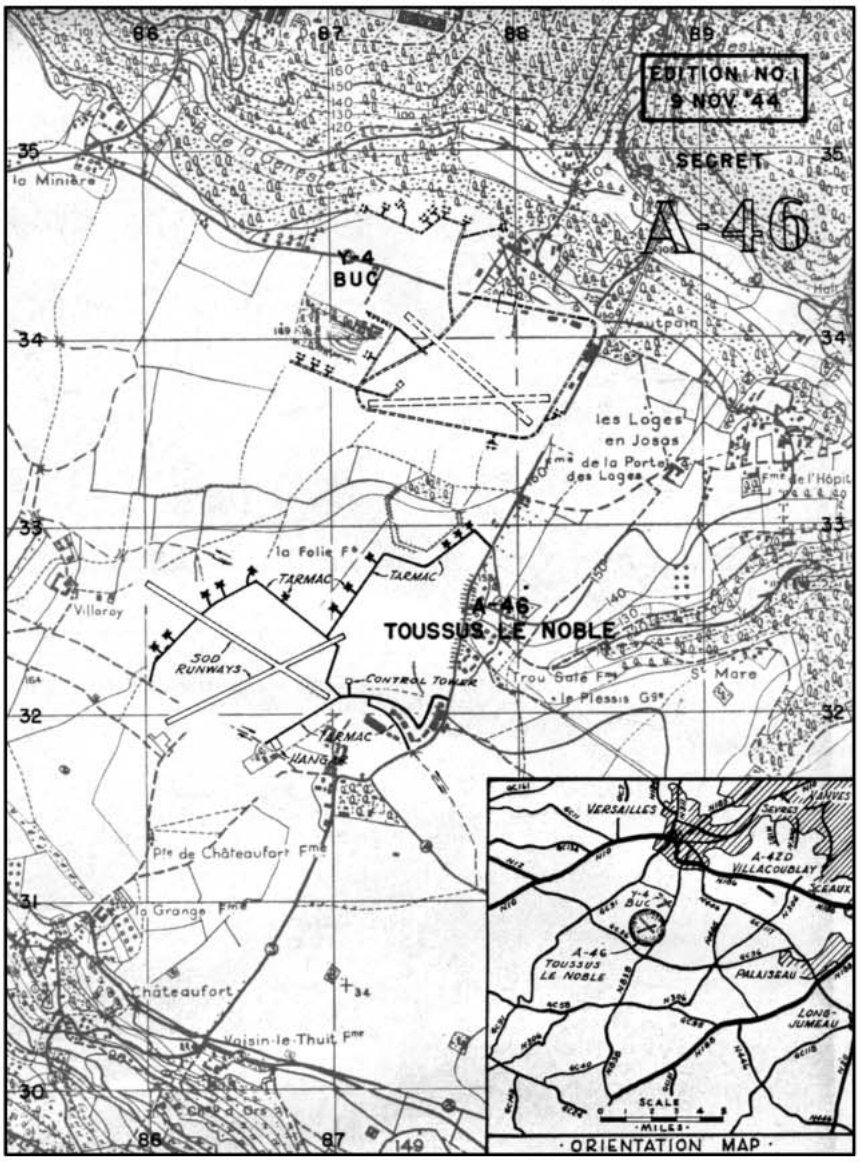
THE FATAL FLIGHT

Ramsay planned to fly to Brussels on January 2, 1945 to consult with Montgomery and his 21st Army Group staff on the defence of the northern Scheldt islands, although the threat to these had been much diminished by the defeat of the German Ardennes offensive. This should have been a routine flight conducted in fairly normal winter conditions. Since moving his headquarters to France, he used the airfield at Toussus-le-Noble which, using an Allied system of nomenclature in use since the Normandy landings, was often referred to as A-46. It was run by the USAAF and to them it was also known as AAF Station 384. It was primarily a communications and liaison facility, but from time to time operational fighters made use of it for refuelling.

That morning, Ramsay's personal aircraft was prepared for the flight. A Lockheed Hudson V, Serial Number AM550, this aircraft had been at the Admiral's disposal since the middle of 1944, when the first reference is made in his diary to flying in one piloted by Temporary Acting Lieutenant Commander Sir G. J. E. Lewis, Bt, RNVR. On January 2, Lewis was to pilot the Hudson. The aircraft belonged to No. 781 Squadron, which was based at Lee-on-Solent in Hampshire. Lewis had been CO of the squadron earlier, but he was now employed as personal pilot to Ramsay, who had requested him for this appointment. Present at Toussus was a small detachment from the parent squadron, known as 781X Flight. This detachment, whose principal duty was the running of a DH Domini and Beechcraft Traveller aircraft, had two pilots (Albert Bret and John Sharp), an aircrewman and 14 other ratings supervised by a Petty Officer Air Fitter, an Aircraft Artificer 4th Class and a Sub-Lieutenant (Air Engineer) RNVR. An additional charge on 781X Flight was the turning round of visiting aircraft such as Oxfords and Expediters and, of course, on this occasion, Ramsay's Hudson.

This particular aircraft had first been taken on charge by the RAF in April 1941 As an A/S aircraft, it had carried out one front-line tour with No. 224 Squadron from May 1941 until September 1942. Overhauled, it re-entered front-line service in the autumn of 1943, only to be badly damaged in an accident two months later. Rebuilt and by now converted for use as a transport, it passed back to American ownership in the USAAF in February 1944. On June 3, it was allocated for the use of the ANCXF, and Lieutenant-Commander Lewis, accompanied by John Sharp, both of whom were experiencing the Hudson for the first time, collected it from Heathrow (often written then as Heath Row) the same day. Sharp was to witness the take-off from Toussus in January 1945. For some of its early time in Ramsay's service, it was flown by Lieutenant Bret, who later commanded 781X Flight. In that capacity he too was at Toussus when Ramsay started his last flight.

Before moving to the events on January 2, it is perhaps useful to consider further both location and aircraft. Toussus-le-Noble, lying 12 miles to the south-west of Paris and about ten miles south-east of Ramsay's own HQ at St Germain-en-Laye, had two earth runways aligned NE–SW and NW–SE. Taking off to the south-west, as happened on January 2, there were no obstacles on the climb-out path and the ground sloped gently beyond the end of the 1,200-yard runway: half a mile out, the terrain was 30 feet below runway level, leading towards the wooded Mérantaise valley just over a mile away. Under these circumstances, a Hudson at full weight should have been able to take off in 900 yards in zero wind conditions. With five knots of wind from the west-south-west, as on January 2, the runway should have been more than adequate. There was a light haze and visibility of 2,000 yards. The temperature was just below freezing point.



Toussus-le-Noble was one of the earliest airfields to be established in the Paris area, being used by the Farman brothers in the early days of French aviation. Basically still a grass airfield when captured from the Germans in August 1944, the US IX Engineer Command schematic plan as of November that year shows two earth runways: the longest extending NW–SE at 3,600ft and the NE–SW of 3,300ft. There were dispersals for 75 aircraft and, although there were German fuel tanks of 18,000 gallons, it seems from the American specifications that this storage was not used and that refuelling was via bowsers. The wind on the morning of January 2, 1945 was five knots from the west-south-west, the operative runway being the NE–SW.

At Toussus on that Tuesday morning, work began on preparing the Hudson for its flight to Brussels. On previous deployments to the airfield, an Aircraft Artificer (AA) had accompanied the pilot and aircrewman, but the AA was not present on this occasion. Similarly, 781X Flight held no manuals or tools for the Hudson and the Daily Inspection (DI) had to be conducted using experience, rather than hard information. Although this seems slapdash by modern standards, it was probably quite common during the Second World War as many different types might pass through relatively small air stations such as Toussus. Perhaps, more importantly, aircraft then (including the Hudson) were not only less complex, but also had many common features which made non-specialised support acceptable. In any event, with one possible exception described later, there was never any suspicion that inadequate or negligent preparation and inspection contributed to the accident.

As well as the rest of the DI, a number of the Flight's ratings spent some time clearing frost and snow from the aircraft's surfaces as it had been standing in the open under conditions of occasional snow and sub-zero temperatures over the New Year period. Clearance started at about 8.30 a.m. and occupied some two hours. It was a task which relied largely on manual labour, involving such basic implements as brooms. This was considered satisfactorily completed, as were other checks and inspections. Shortly after 10 a.m., the Flight's Air Engineer Officer, Sub-Lieutenant J. H. Tolley, RNVR, went into the Hudson's cockpit to conduct engine run-ups. He was part of the way through this process when the pilot, Lieutenant-Commander Lewis, came into the cockpit and took over stating that he (Lewis) had more experience of the Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp engines. Lewis also told Tolley not to carry on with run-up checks as he would do these before take-off. Later, when this was done, Tolley neither noticed nor heard anything unusual.

Shortly after 11 a.m., Admiral Ramsay arrived in his car at the aircraft. He was accompanied on his flight by Commander George Rowell, RN, a planning staff officer, and Lieutenant Derek Henderson, RNVR, the Admiral's Flag Lieutenant. The fifth person on board the aircraft was the Telegraphist Air Gunner, Petty Officer Airman David Morgan. Before boarding, Ramsay talked briefly to Bret and some of the others. He handed his stick and notebook to Henderson, took off his duffel coat and donned a leather flying jacket. Ramsay appeared to be completely at ease. The Admiral, Rowell and Henderson then boarded the aircraft.

The Hudson taxied out to the eastern end of the runway. As it went, some white patches appeared to be visible on its wings. The take-off was witnessed by several observers, a number of whom were pilots, including some with Hudson experience. Lieutenant Bret and Sub-Lieutenant Sharp have already been mentioned, as has Sub-Lieutenant Tolley, the Air Engineer Officer. Also present with clear views were Captain Michael Adams, USAAF, the Commanding Officer of the airfield, and Captain David Martin, USAAF, a pilot, and there is virtual unanimity in their accounts of what occurred.

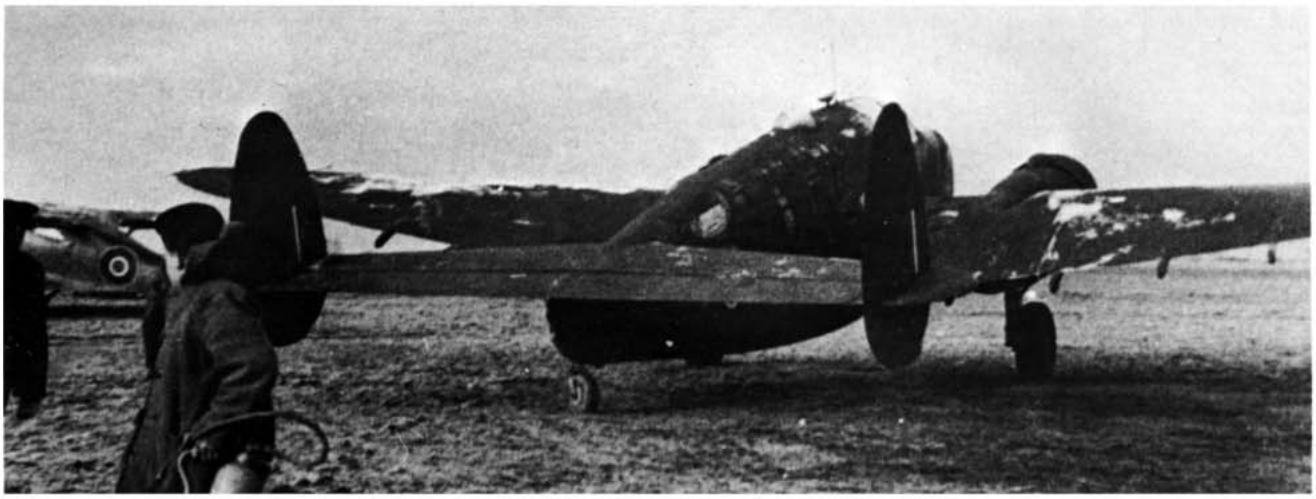
Firstly, the aircraft appeared to be very slow to gain speed for the take-off. Bret considered that at the point where he would have expected the aircraft to be doing 70 knots, it was going at little more than 40 knots. Nonetheless, both he and the others had no impression that there was anything wrong with the engines: only that they were not being used at full power. Sharp, some distance down the runway, noticed that both engines appeared to be operating satisfactorily by ear. However, he also noted that, on take-off, the Hudson rocked from side to side and appeared unstable. Others noticed that, before finally leaving the ground, the aircraft lifted first one wheel then the other. In Adams' account, it skipped and jumped about three times before unsticking finally. All observers noted that the aircraft became airborne in a three-point attitude, that is, without the tail up. Further, this occurred fairly close to the western end of the runway.

Bret experienced a sense of relief that the aircraft had got into the air, but then noted that the climb was very shallow and the undercarriage remained down. Adams, one floor up in the administration building, thought that the aircraft was in what he called a mushing attitude. Less than 1,000 yards from the end of the runway, the port wing slowly began to drop, a situation from which the aircraft never recovered. Bret reckoned the aircraft to have reached 200-300 feet, but Adams thought 100 feet more likely. At 10 degrees of bank, Bret thought that the Hudson was attempting a turn to

The departure was being routinely filmed by Paramount News — little did the cameraman know he was recording the last few minutes in the life of the Admiral and his crew. On the right, Lieutenant Bret, the CO of No. 781 Squadron's X Flight.

Ramsay's aide, Lieutenant Derek Henderson, helps him don a sheepskin flying jacket against the sub-zero temperature. (IWM)

Ramsay's contribution to the successful landings in Normandy was immeasurable, yet, like Leigh-Mallory, the Allied Air Commander who was still listed as missing on a flight to the Far East the previous November (see *After the Battle* No. 39), the Admiral was not to see the final victory. (IWM)



Ice or snow reflects from the top of the mainplanes as the Hudson turns to starboard to taxi to the eastern end of the runway. At this point, the cameraman stops filming and does not bother to record the actual take-off. (IWM)

port. However, although he could not say why, he did not like the look of the possible turn. Then the aircraft dropped its port wing and spiralled to the ground. Some parts of the aircraft, such as engines were separated and thrown some distance away. The main fuselage was relatively intact but, although level, there was a break in the structure at about three windows from aft. Fires were started, and although fire and rescue crews were quickly on the scene, it was evident that all those on board had died on impact, or very shortly afterwards.

Thus passed the senior serving Royal Navy officer to die on active service during the Second World War. The navy and the nation were fortunate in having been done many great services by Ramsay, most notably Dunkirk; the Normandy invasion; and, on a smaller if no less significant scale, Walcheren. It can only be regretted that he did not live longer to enjoy a retirement more merited than most and the pleasures of his family, which he so plainly enjoyed.

Save for the new tarmac runway, this is the view that the eyewitnesses would have had from the control tower in very similar weather conditions.

Perhaps, having turned away, the cameraman had started to pack away his gear. Perhaps he was already walking to his vehicle when suddenly came the awful sound of an aircraft hitting the ground. Rushing towards the spot beyond the airfield's western boundary where a column of smoke was rising, he approached the scene of the tragedy. (IWM)

THE CAUSES OF THE ACCIDENT

What had happened was only too evident; the how and why was not so clear immediately. As was normal in such cases, an investigation and Board of Enquiry was held: the former reported at the beginning of February and the latter convened towards the end of that month. There were three broad avenues for the investigation to consider:

(a) Structural or mechanical failure
(b) Mistakes in the preparation of the Hudson
(c) Pilot error

The first of these was the easiest to deal with. Post-crash examination revealed no signs of structural failure or defects. Both engines were stripped under supervision and showed no indications of damage other than that caused by impact with the ground. There was one further potential cause of the accident which was fuel contamination. Such an occurrence was thought unlikely for two reasons. Firstly, the bowser which had fuelled the Hudson had also recently supplied some 40 other aircraft of different types, none of which had reported any difficulty. Secondly, the evidence of several of the witnesses, some of whom were pilots and a few of whom had Hudson experience, suggested that there had been no engine problems detectable by ear. Some thought that the aircraft might not have used full power during its take-off run and brief climb, but none detected signs of any splutter or loss of power from either engine. Structural and mechanical failure could therefore be ruled out as causes of the accident.

The lack of documentation and tools, as well as Hudson experience in the ground crew was looked at and, although it was thought that this was not as it ought to be, it could not be considered responsible for the subsequent accident. It was recommended that measures should, however, be taken to prevent a recurrence of this situation. The form A700 — Flight Authorisation Sheet — which was carried by the aircraft had been properly completed by the ground crew, although Lewis had failed to sign it in a number of places as required by regulations.

Evidence given to the Board made it clear that the 781X Flight ground crew had spent a considerable time in attempting to clear snow, ice and frost from the aircraft. Indeed, this had probably been the most labour-intensive part of their preparation. The parking of the aircraft in the open over the New Year period in cold weather had led to a build-up on the wings and elsewhere. However, a relatively low awareness of the hazard of airframe icing, coupled with primitive clearance equipment, largely brooms and cloths, may have meant that, although much effort was expended on this task, it may not have been complete or sufficiently thorough. In any case, the process of clearance was completed some time before the aircraft took off, and the intervening period of about an hour in sub-zero temperatures may have allowed some frost to reform on the wings. Although the act of clearance was the task of the ground crew, the responsibility that the aircraft was in a fit state for flying rested as always with the captain of the aircraft, that is Lewis.

The question of some airframe icing being present on take-off, and whether it contributed to the subsequent accident, can never now be determined with certainty. There must, however, be some possibility that it did because, as chance would have it, a Paramount film crew were at Toussus that morning and they filmed Ramsay embarking in the aircraft, its initial taxying and the consequences of the crash. Stills from that film were seen by the Board and they clearly show white areas on the wing. The Board concluded that the aircraft did indeed have hoar frost on its wings. However, this matter was to be returned to after the Board had completed its investigations and rendered findings and recommendations.

Turning finally to the captain of the aircraft, it may be helpful to take a look at Lewis's career as a pilot. A lawyer with a civil pilot's licence, he had joined the RNVR at the outbreak of war. A few months later, he had gained his naval 'Wings'. He spent virtually all his service career with No. 781 Squadron in various capacities in total amassing nearly 2,500 accident-free flying hours, of which 106 were on Hudsons. Although he rose to command No. 781 Squadron, he had never received any heavy twin-engine training, nor had he received any 'checking out' on the Hudson, on which he had signed his own Qualifying Certificate as CO. That said, he was to some extent the product of a Fleet Air Arm (FAA) having to expand rapidly to meet the demands of war; and of an organisation which had only recently gained freedom from the RAF.

One probable result of this was that Lewis had developed faults, which had never been corrected. Principal amongst these was a tendency to take off at less than full revs, power and boost, and then to continue the climb-out at less than safety speed. In a twin-engined aircraft, this speed is defined as being high enough to allow recovery should one engine fail. This unfortunate trait of Lewis's, although never formally corrected, had been noted by several other pilots. In 1943, a Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) had flown with Lewis in a Beaufighter and noted that he climbed this difficult aircraft at well under 100 knots, when its speed should have been much greater. Later, Lewis was observed to follow the same characteristic in a Hudson and apparently did not understand the concept of safety speed. Just a few days before the crash, Lieutenant Bret, too, had seen Lewis flying the aircraft in a similar fashion and had been perturbed to learn that Lewis was using much less power than was safe.

All the passengers and crew are beyond help; Royal Navy personnel walk back slowly to their transport past the scattered wreckage, leaving American airmen to douse the flames. (IWM)

The reported characteristics of Lewis's take-off on January 2 are entirely consistent with this fault. By not using power on the take-off run, he almost ran out of runway. Just clawing into the air, he was unable to raise the tail adequately to ensure full controllability. Pilot's Notes for the Hudson V make it clear that the tail should be raised from the three-point position early during the take-off run to keep the aircraft under control. They read:

'As soon as the aircraft has begun to pick up speed, the control wheel should be eased right forward to get the tail up as soon as possible. With full gross load, the aircraft can be eased off the ground at 60kts IAS, but in practice it has been found advisable to wait until a speed of 65kts has been attained. As soon as the aircraft is airborne, the stick should be eased slightly forward and the aircraft held level until a speed of 100kts is reached at which speed the initial climb may be started.

'Note the Following:

i. [use of brakes during initial roll]

11. If the aircraft gets bounced into the air at slow speed, care must be exercised in using the ailerons to maintain lateral level. If a wing drops at low speed, opposite rudder should be used to bring it up. The take-off run should be so chosen as to minimise the possibility of being bounced into the air at low speed.

As soon as the aircraft has FINALLY left the ground, the undercarriage lever should be moved to the UP position.'

Reinforcing this line are the views of Wing Commander Roland Falk, RAF, the Chief Test Pilot at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough. Communicating with the accident investigation officer just over a month after the crash, he wrote:

'I have myself experienced the effect of hoar frost on the wings of a Hudson when taking off. The effect was most noticeable, both in lengthening the run to unstick and also in the lack of lateral control when airborne. I was not happy to climb away until I had held the aircraft down and gained considerable speed.'

When Lewis was flying at a speed too low for safety, it would appear that he attempted a turn to port. Evidence produced to the enquiry suggested that even a relatively thin layer of frost could increase the point of stall of a Hudson-like wing by over 10 knots. Had Lewis either used full power and reached a safer speed, or gained more height before attempting a turn, he might have either avoided or at least been able to recover from the subsequent spin. Although frost should have been cleared from the wings before take-off, it would appear that it was Lewis's accumulated bad flying practices of several years that caused Hudson AM 550 to crash.

A recommendation of the Board of Enquiry led to disciplinary action being initiated against the AA4 for negligent performance of duty. However, having heard the evidence of Lieutenant Bret, Sub-Lieutenant Tolley and a photographic officer amongst others, it was decided that the evidence did not support the charge and the case was dismissed.

Below: **This photograph, crudely annotated in the margin, was presented to the Board of Enquiry showing the crash position. The Paramount film, from which these stills have been taken, was also considered when trying to establish the cause of the accident. (PRO)**

Although never commanding a major conventional battlefleet, Ramsay was one of the most successful and important leaders in the Second World War. However, nothing remains to mark the spot where he died, just a few yards from a new road near the hamlet of Mérantais, and there is no memorial or marker to say that here fell one of the Royal Navy's greatest sons.

The bodies were laid to rest at St Germain-en-Laye New Communal Cemetery on the Rue Péreire. (ECPA)

RAMSAY TODAY — MEMORIALS SOLID AND OTHERWISE

On January 8, 1945, Ramsay, with the four others who had died in the Hudson, were buried with full military honours at the cemetery of St Germain-en-Laye. The mourners included General Eisenhower; Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, the First Sea Lord; General Koenig, the French Military Governor of Paris, and Mr Duff Cooper, the British Ambassador. A naval guard was provided by HMS *Excellent* and a French naval band 'Musique de la Flotte' provided funeral music. On the same day, a memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey

As well as his grave in France, Ramsay is also commemorated in a window in Portsmouth Cathedral dedicated to him and to those who died under his command during the operations at Dunkirk and Normandy. His name is also noted in the war memorial in the parish of Leitholm, as well as in Christ Church, Duns, both in the Scottish border country near his family home.

In less tangible form, Ramsay was the subject of two post-war biographies. One by David Woodward, *Ramsay at War* (London, 1957), has recently been described as an heroic treatment. The other, *Full Cycle: The Biography of Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay* by Rear-Admiral W. S. Chalmers (London, 1959) has the benefit of having had access to Ramsay's letters and diaries. Chalmers' admiration of Ramsay shines through this work although, considering its period and the conventions then observed by 'authorised biographers', he produced a balanced portrait of the Admiral. After this, a considerable hiatus ensued other than Captain S. W. Roskill's *Churchill and the Admirals* (London, 1977) which rates Ramsay extremely highly in the context that he enjoyed Churchill's consistent confidence with the very slight caveat that Ramsay never commanded a major fleet.

Since then, there have been peripheral mentions of the Admiral, especially in works dealing with 'Neptune', but few substantial works on Ramsay until the 1990s. The current decade has, however, seen a considerable resurgence in interest although no full scale biography as yet. Firstly, Martin Stephen's *The Fighting Admirals* (London, 1991) produces a very favourable account of the Admiral. This work, however, has been considered controversial by some, not because of his views on Ramsay, but because of his championing of two admirals generally maligned — Dudley Pound and Tom Phillips — and his downgrading of another, Andrew Cunningham. Corelli Barnett's *Engage the Enemy More Closely: the Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London, 1991) amplified by other articles and speeches by this writer singles out Ramsay for particular praise.

A further book containing an appreciation of Ramsay is *Men of War: Great Naval Leaders of World War II*, edited by Stephen Howarth (London, 1992). Lastly, the Admiral's diary for 1944 has been published as *The Year of D-Day* edited by Robert W. Love Jr and John Major (Hull, 1994), giving a great deal of insight into the man, his character and the views he had of his contemporaries.

A bitter moment for Eisenhower, leading the mourners on January 8 — just a year after he had assumed the mantle of Supreme Commander. (ECPA)

Fifty years after the event, we felt that it was fitting for us to remember the loss of Admiral Ramsay; Jean Paul Pallud made a pilgrimage to seek out the crash site at Toussus, while Karel Margry journeyed to the cemetery at St Germain.